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THE ENGLISH FAMILIAR ESSAY IN  
THE EARLY NINETEENTH  
CENTURY





THE ENGLISH FAMILIAR ESSAY IN  
THE EARLY NINETEENTH  
CENTURY

THE ELEMENTS OLD AND NEW WHICH WENT  
INTO ITS MAKING AS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE  
WRITINGS OF HUNT, HAZLITT AND LAMB

MARIE HAMILTON LAW

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## PREFACE

This study is based upon an examination of the familiar essays of Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt with the purpose of determining the elements old and new which went into the making of the familiar essay in the early nineteenth century. In the absence of a definitive edition of the essays of Leigh Hunt, it has been impossible to make a thorough study of this essayist. The majority of Hunt's familiar essays appeared in his own periodicals, now difficult of access. The collections which have been made of his essays are far from inclusive; and a goodly number of his familiar papers still await an editor. Those which have been reprinted have in many instances suffered from extensive cutting, so that a study of them is necessarily incomplete.

I should like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation and indebtedness to Professor Percy Van Dyke Shelly for his direction of this study, which owes its completion to his guidance, encouragement and unfailing interest. I count it a great privilege to have had the inspiration afforded by his scholarship. I also wish to express my appreciation to the members of the English Department under whom I have studied for their kindness, and the vision they have given me of a scholarly and human approach to literature.

I am deeply indebted to Mrs. Anne Wallace Howland, Librarian of the Drexel Institute, Mr. Seymour Thompson, Librarian of the University of Pennsylvania, and Mr. E. R. B. Willis, Associate Librarian of Cornell University, and to the Staffs of these libraries for their courtesy and helpfulness in making the materials of this study available to me.

M. H. L.

Philadelphia, May, 1932.



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## CHAPTER I

### THE PERIODICAL ESSAY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: THE *TATLER*, THE *SPECTATOR*, AND THEIR SUCCESSORS

The term "essay" continues to baffle and confound the makers of definitions, and its use in English for writings of many different kinds can but embarrass the sensitive critical conscience. Such widely varying types as Montaigne's essay *On Gardening*, Bacon's aphoristic essays, Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*, the periodical essays of Addison and Steele, the critical, biographical and historical papers of Macaulay, the scientific essays of Huxley, the versified philosophy of Pope's *Essay on Man*—have all been termed essays. A definition which should embrace such a variety of compositions would necessarily be so loose as to be no definition at all. One writer speaks of the essay as "a tempting label for any piece of writing which does not easily come within any of the better defined categories."<sup>1</sup> But this is merely to empty the word of all critical value, and to divorce it from its proper literary association. Certainly, for critical purposes, we must distinguish between writings which possess some distinction of thought and manner and certain qualities of permanence and those that are merely topical, ephemeral, journalistic, or technical—in other words between essays on the one hand and all those articles, "papers," and treatises which burden our current periodicals, both popular and learned, and which flourish today and tomorrow are cast into the oven. [The term "essay" must be kept true to its high lineage and long and distinguished tradition, at least by the critic and the literary historian. Even in this sense the word is a broad one, including essays of different kinds; and these the critic must be careful to distinguish. [But the highest type of all, the one that is most certainly to be classed as pure literature and ranked among the

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Zeitlin, ed. *Seventeenth Century Essays*, N. Y., 1926, Introduction, p. v.



fine arts is the personal or familiar essay, which Alexander Smith called "the lyric of prose," and which emerged in the work of Montaigne.

The most distinguishing mark of the familiar essay is its subjectivity; personality is its keynote. "It is not my acts that I write," said Montaigne, "it is I, it is my essence." The familiar essay conveys the moods, the fantasies and whims, the chance reflections and random observations of the essayist, and it has been excellently defined as "a short prose composition in which the author, writing of himself or of something that is near to his heart, discloses his personality to the reader in an intimate and familiar way."<sup>2</sup> Introduced into England in the seventeenth century, the *Essays* of Montaigne in the translations of John Florio (1603), and Charles Cotton (1685) soon attained a vogue, and this type of personal essay struck roots in English soil in the work of Sir William Cornwallis, Sir Thomas Browne, Abraham Cowley, and Sir William Temple—in these much more than in the essays of Bacon.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century a kind of essay appeared, known as the periodical essay, which held the attention of the English public throughout the century, and which although it has certain characteristics of the familiar essay, is to be distinguished from it. (It contains description, narration and informal discussion, and treats trivial material in a whimsical manner. It is written for the most part in the first person, is conversational in tone, addresses the reader in friendly fashion, taking him into the writer's confidence, is witty, humorous and brief.) Therefore in many essentials it is closely allied to the familiar or personal essay. Moreover, the periodical essayist sometimes introduces autobiographic elements into his writing, and expresses his opinion on many subjects, but he is not self-revealing in the manner of the familiar essayist. He does not show the innermost working of his heart but conceals himself behind a fictitious figure such as Isaac Bickerstaff, or the Spectator. Also the periodical essayist has an ulterior purpose: to report the news "foreign and domestic," to

<sup>2</sup> Prof. P. V. D. Shelly, "The Familiar Essay," *University of Pennsylvania Public Lectures*, 1916-17. Phila., 1917, p. 227 f., where will be found also a differentiation between the familiar essay and other related but different types.

afford entertainment, and to bring about reform in morals, manners and taste. To these ends he makes use of various kinds of writing, short stories, literary criticism, anecdotes, character sketches, letters and satire. His writing is more objective than subjective and his aim is never lost sight of. Thus in several essentials the periodical essay differs from the familiar essay, and between the seventeenth century personal essay and the eighteenth century periodical essay there is a real distinction. At the same time there are in the familiar essays of later development, especially in the early nineteenth century, many elements from former times, and the nineteenth century familiar essay could not have taken the form it did, had it not been for eighteenth century developments. To trace the elements old and new which went into the making of the familiar essays of Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt is the purpose of this study. In these three writers the familiar essay reached its period of greatest development in England, and this sudden outburst and flowering of so important a literary *genre* is a phenomenon that demands explanation.

[In the work of Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt the familiar essay preserved all of its earlier characteristics but became so infused with the romantic spirit that it took on new colors and tendencies in a degree to distinguish it from the essays which had preceded it. True to its kind it followed no plan and had no purpose moral or didactic. Its charm consisted in its numerous digressions, its flavor of good conversation, the warmth of its imaginative fancy, and the self-revelation of the writer. The subject matter, grave, gay, humorous, witty, depending upon the mood of the essayist, displayed infinite variety: "On Going a Journey," "The Fear of Death," "The East Wind," "Bad Weather," "A Day by the Fire,"—such papers revealed in prose a romantic spirit which found its counterpart in the poetry of the period.] (The essay partook of the prevailing romanticism in its return to the past, both in the impassioned recollection of past events, and in the charm with which the ancient and enduring is invested; in the poetic descriptions of nature which discover man's kinship to the natural world about him; in the sympathetic portrayal of humble life, in the melancholy sentiment which tinges many of the themes, and in the grotesque features introduced which add the element of strangeness.)

The perfect freedom of the familiar essayist to wander whither his fancy led, to range over all time, and to employ any theme, to begin where he pleased and to stop when he wished afforded an aesthetic delight which had been wanting in the more limited range of subject matter, and in the realistic treatment characteristic of the periodical essay in the eighteenth century. The length of the familiar essay was likewise subject to the whim of the essayist; he might write briefly or at length, create a finished whole within a few pages or continue his paper serially. The familiar essayist, unlike the periodical essayist, wrote for no special coterie or group, nor did he make use of any set devices. He was free to use any literary form he desired; the narrative, the epistle, the dialogue, the "confession," the reverie, the impassioned recollection—all might be employed by him in turn. His style had a flavor, it bore the imprint of his mind and personality; it was in short the man. Such a style, self-revelatory, highly flexible, adapting itself to the theme without losing its individuality was essentially "literary" as distinguished from journalistic.

But though imbued to such an extent with the new spirit, the familiar essay in the nineteenth century gathered to itself elements characteristic of the periodical essays of Addison and Steele. It adapted to its use the letter, the character-sketch and the travel sketch, stamping these forms with its own familiar spirit. Thus the familiar essay as developed by Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt carries on the tradition of Montaigne in that it is familiar in style, in subject matter, and in its revelation of the author's personality. It takes over certain characteristics of the periodical essay, and acquires a new interest through its romantic coloring.

In tracing the development of the familiar essay in the nineteenth century the outstanding topics which deserve consideration are its divergence as a literary form from the periodical essay which preceded it; the spirit of the age which fostered it; the periodicals in which it first emerged; the intellectual currents, old and new, which affected it, and the individual genius of the writers who early brought it to full flower.

The tone and temper of the eighteenth century were so unlike that of the nineteenth that it has become a commonplace to say that

their clergy, and their congregations," he describes in detail the dress and manners of those assembled for worship. The picture is a very amusing, if not a pious, one. In the manner in which Cowper adorns his essays with brief character sketches, he also provides a tie between the periodical essayists of the eighteenth century, and the nineteenth century familiar essayists. His character sketches in their brevity are like those of the *Tatler*, but in the essay frame provided for them, he furnished an example to the familiar essayists. In his essay "On Conversation," for example, he draws an interesting comparison between the conversation of the French and English, and gives point to his remarks by briefly characterizing the various types of conversationalists: the Attitudinarians and Face-Makers, the Professed Speakers, the Tatlers, the Half-Swearers, the Phraseologists, the Silent Men. He follows the same method in his essay "On Keeping a Secret," where he draws in humorous fashion and with great accuracy of observation, the characters of men who are unable to keep the confidences entrusted to them.

The influence of the *Connoisseur* upon Leigh Hunt was a direct one. "The lively papers of the *Connoisseur*," he writes in his *Autobiography*, "gave me an entirely fresh and delightful sense of the merits of essay-writing. I began to think that when Boyer crumpled up and chucked away my "themes" in a passion, he had not done justice to the honest weariness of my anti-formalities, and to their occasional evidences of something better."<sup>15</sup> Hunt thought some of the papers of the *Connoisseur* equal in humor to those of Goldsmith; although he later decided that "they had no pretensions to the genius of the *Vicar of Wakefield*."<sup>16</sup> Immediately following Hunt's acquaintance with the *Connoisseur*, he wrote his first prose for publication, a series of papers called "The Traveller," which appeared in the evening paper of the same name (afterwards incorporated with the *Globe*). Hunt wrote under the signature of "Mr. Town, junior, Critic and Censor-general" in imitation of the "Mr. Town" of the *Connoisseur*. He relates how he offered his papers "with fear and trembling" to the editor of the *Traveller*, and "was

<sup>15</sup> Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, Lond. 1891, p. 124.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

astonished at the gaiety with which he accepted them." <sup>17</sup> "Luckily," Hunt says, "the essays were little read; they were not at all noticed in public." <sup>18</sup>

Goldsmith's *Bee* (October 6-November 24, 1759) in its essay material shows a closer approximation to the work of the nineteenth century familiar essayists than any of the periodicals which had preceded it. In the introduction to the first number, Goldsmith declares his intention of pursuing no fixed method in his periodical. "Like the Bee," he says, "which I had taken for the title of my paper, I would rove from flower to flower, with seeming inattention, but concealed choice, expatiate over all the beauties of the season, and make my industry my amusement." <sup>19</sup>

The *Bee* did not differ in its range from preceding essay periodicals, but in its general tone, it is more modern. Between it and Leigh Hunt's *Indicator*, for instance, there is no such gap as between the *Tatler* and the *Indicator*. In fact the *Bee* and the *Indicator* bear a close resemblance to each other, even in name, for Hunt named his "after a bird which shows people where to find wild honey." One of the chief distinctions between the *Bee* and such an immediate predecessor as the *World* is in the absence of the editorial devices which the *Tatler* and its imitators had employed. The *Bee* has no "Isaac Bickerstaff," or any anonymous mouthpiece between author and reader. Nor is the frame device of "clubs" or coffee houses employed. Some of the essays are presented as letters, but the correspondents' column on personal matters has vanished. Although the *Bee* was advertised as "consisting of a variety of essays on the amusements, follies and vices in fashion, particularly the most recent topics of conversation," it is the latter that is given emphasis. A little travel and biography, theatrical criticism, translations, stories taken from various sources, and moral dissertations on abstract topics—"On Justice and Generosity," "On the Instability of Worldly Grandeur," etc.,—make up the bulk of the contents. The fop, the beau, the cuckold, the roarer, the world of London fashion and folly no longer parade so frequently across the

<sup>17</sup> Op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> *The Bee*, No. 1 (Oliver Goldsmith, *Miscellaneous Works*,<sup>4</sup> with biographical introduction by Prof. Masson. Lond., 1928.)

pages. The horizon has widened; Goldsmith views the scene with a more philosophical detachment than his predecessors. His moral essays display at times the seriousness of Johnson. His remarks upon the follies of his day have none of the "sparkle" or smart satire which characterize those of the *World*. In the first number he assured his readers that neither war nor scandal should form a part of his paper, and to this policy he adheres. His essay "On Dress" is a lively and humorous account of feminine fashions, which shows keen powers of observation. His recollection in this essay of his walk in the park with his Cousin Hannah, is in the familiar vein of the nineteenth century essayists, and exhibits the ability to draw character, to report dialogue, to invest an incident with humor, and to flash the whole before the reader in a few sentences, a talent which Lamb possessed in high degree. It also is illustrative of the transparent wall which separates this type of essay writing from the relating of incident in the novel.

Goldsmith's familiar mood is to be seen in the following passage: "When I reflect on the unambitious retirement in which I passed the earlier part of my life in the country, I cannot avoid feeling some pain in thinking that those happy days are never to return. In that retreat all nature seemed capable of affording pleasure; I then made no refinements on happiness, but could be pleased with the most awkward efforts of rustic mirth; thought cross-purposes the highest stretch of human wit, and questions and commands the most rational amusement for spending the evening. Happy could so charming an illusion still continue! I find age and knowledge only contribute to sour our dispositions. My present enjoyments may be more refined, but they are infinitely less pleasing. The pleasure Garrick gives can no way compare to that I have received from a country wag, who imitated a Quaker's sermon. The music of Mattei<sup>20</sup> is dissonance to what I felt when our old dairymaid sang me into tears with Johnny Armstrong's Last Good Night, or the Cruelty of Barbara Allen."<sup>21</sup> This would be exactly the mood in which Lamb or Hazlitt wrote, if it were heightened a little, and the recollection made more impassioned. Hazlitt recalling Wem, and

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<sup>20</sup> In the 1765 Edition "of Mattei" was altered to "of the finest singer."

<sup>21</sup> "Happiness In a Great Measure Dependent on Constitution," *The Bee*, No. 2.

Lamb musing on his childhood days at "Blakesmoor," are inspired with the same pleasurable sensations. The similarity is further emphasized by the fact that the recollection is truly autobiographic.<sup>22</sup>

"A City Night Piece" is also written in familiar vein, and Goldsmith's description of those "who make the streets their couch, and find a short repose from wretchedness at the doors of the opulent"<sup>23</sup> is in marked contrast to the picture of London life drawn by preceding eighteenth century essayists. Something of the music of poetry as well as a touch of rhetoric, is in Goldsmith's prose: "The clock has just struck two, the expiring taper rises and sinks in the socket, the watchman forgets the hour in slumber, the laborious and the happy are at rest, and nothing wakes but meditation, guilt, revelry, and despair. The drunkard once more fills the destroying bowl, the robber walks his midnight round, and the suicide lifts his guilty arm against his own sacred person. . . . What a gloom hangs all around! The dying lamp feebly emits a yellow gleam; no sound is heard but of the chiming clock, or the distant watch-dog."<sup>24</sup>

The varied styles in which Goldsmith wrote in the *Bee* are worthy of note. That he consciously altered his style to suit the subject matter, we know from the introduction to the first number, where he states that "there is a studied difference in subject and style."<sup>25</sup> But whether Goldsmith writes in the reasoned manner of his essay "On Education," or in the familiar style of the papers already quoted, indulges in "A Reverie," narrates the story of Hypatia, or with scientific exactness describes the life of a spider, his prose is clear, simple, flexible, and unmannered. It bears the stamp of no age, but is as fresh today as when it was written. There are indications that Goldsmith in the *Bee* and in his essays contributed to the *Busy Body*, the *British Magazine*, etc., was trying to appeal to a higher standard of taste than that catered to by the average magazine. His "Specimen of a Magazine in Miniature" is an excellent

<sup>22</sup> Goldsmith wrote Mr. Hodson, Dec. 27, 1757: "If I go to the opera where Signora Colomba pours out all the mazes of melody, I sit and sigh for Lissoy's fire-side, and Johnny Armstrong's Last Good Night from Peggy Golden." Oliver Goldsmith. *Works*, edited by Peter Cunningham, Lond., 1854, p. 31 (notes).

<sup>23</sup> *The Bee*, No. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 1.

satire on the contents of the average magazine of the time. In the *Bee* (No. 4, October 27, 1759) he comments upon its slow sale, and says: "perhaps I was mistaken in designing my paper as an agreeable relaxation to the studious, or an help to conversation among the gay; instead of addressing it to such, I should have written down to the taste and apprehension of the many, and sought for reputation on the broad road. Literary fame, I now find, like religious, generally begins among the vulgar."<sup>26</sup>

Goldsmith made a further contribution to the essay in his *Citizen of the World* papers which first appeared in the *Public Ledger*, 1760-61. This series of one hundred and twenty-three letters,<sup>27</sup> purporting to have been written by a Chinese living in England, appealed to the London public which had tired of the usual moral disquisition of the periodical essayists. In the learned Chinese critic, Lien Chi Altangi, Goldsmith found a means of criticising the English nation by comparing it with a foreign land. Instead of using the device of club and coffee-house, he bound his essays together by a "frame-tale" which supplied the amusement and love-interest. The large design is a moral one: to expose the follies of his generation, and to satirize "prevailing absurdities which commonly usurp the softer names of fashions." Unlike Johnson, he does not attempt to deal with vices common to all men.

The familiar style in which the *Citizen of the World* papers were written subjected Goldsmith to criticism since the pseudo-oriental works of the period were couched in grandiloquent and flowery language, supposed to be imitative of the Eastern manner. Goldsmith replied to his critics: "What is palmed upon you daily for an imitation of Eastern writing no way resembles their manner, either in sentiment or diction."<sup>28</sup> Also he pretended that his style was the result of translation: "The Editor on this, and every other occasion, has endeavored to translate the letter-writer in such a manner as he himself, had he perfectly understood English, would have written."<sup>29</sup> The conversational tone of Goldsmith's style, the

<sup>26</sup> *The Bee*, No. 4.

<sup>27</sup> In the original series in the *Public Ledger* there were one hundred and eighteen letters.

<sup>28</sup> *Public Ledger*, Letter XXXI. *Citizen of the World*, Letter 33.

<sup>29</sup> *Public Ledger*, Letter XXXII.



romantic mood of some of his essays, his excellent characterization, and keen power of observation all helped to point the way to the familiar essay of the next century.

Goldsmith's essays were favorites of Leigh Hunt. "Goldsmith enchanted me," he writes. "I knew no end of repeating passages out of the *Essays* and the *Citizen of the World*—such as the account of the Club, with its Babel of talk; of Beau Tibbs, with his dinner of ox-cheek, which 'his grace was so fond of'; and of the wooden-legged sailor. . . . Then there was his correct, sweet style; the village painting in his poems; . . . and above all, the *Vicar of Wakefield*—with Burchell, whom I adored."<sup>30</sup> Hunt in his zest for life, his "animal spirits," his optimism, his good nature, his sympathy and his unworldliness has much in common with Goldsmith, whom he also resembles in the simplicity and easy grace of his style, and in his ability to draw character touched with humor.

Hazlitt also was an admirer of Goldsmith. He thought him "more observing, more original, more natural and picturesque than Johnson,"<sup>31</sup> and he considered Beau Tibbs "the best comic sketch since the time of Addison."<sup>32</sup>

Certain characteristics of the writing of the early nineteenth century familiar essayists are also to be found in two Scotch essay periodicals, the *Mirror* (1779-1780), and the *Lounger* (1785-1787). The *Mirror*, a single essay periodical, which made its first appearance January 23, 1779, was issued every Tuesday and Saturday by Henry Mackenzie, author of the *Man of Feeling*, assisted by a group of friends, none of whom had previously written for publication. The aim of the paper as stated in the first number, was "to hold, as it were, the Mirror up to Nature, to show Virtue her own features, Vice her own image, and the very age and body of the Time his form and pressure." The intention was not only "to show the world what it is," but "to point out what it should be."<sup>33</sup> The difficulties of the periodical writer are set forth at some length, and are of interest as showing the attitude of the

<sup>30</sup> *Autobiography*, pp. 126-27.

<sup>31</sup> "On the Periodical Essayists," *Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. by A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover, Lond. 1903, v. 8, p. 104.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>33</sup> *Mirror*, No. 1.

public at this time toward the essay periodical. "An anonymous periodical writer, when he first gives his work to the public, is pretty much in the situation of the stranger. If he endeavour to amuse the young and the lively, by the sprightliness of his wit, or the sallies of his imagination, the grave and the serious throw aside his works as trifling and contemptible. The reader of romance and sentiment finds no pleasure but in some eventful story, suited to his taste and disposition; while with him who aims at instruction in politics, religion, or morality, nothing is relished that has not a relation to the object he pursues. But no sooner is the public informed that this unknown author has already figured in the world as a poet, historian, or essayist; that his writings are read and admired by the Shaftesburies, the Addisons, and the Chesterfields of the age; than beauties are discovered in every line; he is extolled as a man of universal talents, who can laugh with the merry, and be serious with the grave; who, at one time, can animate his reader with the glowing sentiments of virtue and compassion, and, at another, carry him through the calm disquisitions of science and philosophy." <sup>34</sup>

The usual subjects common to the essay periodical are found in the *Mirror*. Theatrical and literary criticism, education, duelling, the character of a man of fashion, "female manners," national character of France and England, modern good-breeding compared with the ancient, dreams, superstition and the fear of death, calamities incident to extreme old age, a dangerous species of coquette, are among the topics discussed, an assortment which in its range suggests nothing new. The importance of the *Mirror* in the development of the essay is its attitude toward nature, which is "romantic" as compared with the traditional attitude of Addison and Johnson. The effect of nature upon man, the feelings of sadness it inspires and the recollections it awakens form the theme of the essay "Of Spring" (*Mirror*, No. 16), written by Mackenzie. An extract will serve to illustrate its romantic vein:

"Amidst the returning verdure of the earth, the mildness of the air, and the serenity of the sky, I have found a still and quiet melancholy take possession of my soul, which the beauty of the

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<sup>34</sup> Op. cit.'

landscape and the melody of the birds rather soothed than overcame. . . . Spring, as the renewal of verdure and of vegetation, becomes naturally the season of remembrance. We are surrounded with objects new only in their revival, but which we acknowledge as our acquaintances in the years that are past. Winter, which stopped the progression of nature, removed them from us for a while, and we meet, like friends long parted, with emotions rather of tenderness than of gaiety.

"This train of ideas once awakened, memory follows over a very extensive field. And, in such a disposition of mind, objects of cheerfulness and delight are, from those very qualities, the most adapted to inspire that milder sort of sadness which, in the language of our native bard, is 'pleasant and mournful to the soul.' They will inspire this, not only from the recollection of the past, but from the prospect of the future. . . ." <sup>85</sup>

A romantic tendency is also evident in the description of natural scenery in the paper entitled "Effects of Excessive Delicacy and Refinement" (*Mirror* No. 10), written by W. W. Craig, a lawyer. Its sentiment is worthy of the author of the *Man of Feeling*: "Our road lay through a *glen*, romantic and picturesque, which we reached soon after sun-set, in a mild and still evening. On each side were stupendous mountains; their height; the rude and projecting rocks, of which some of them were composed; the gloomy caverns they seemed to contain; and the appearance of devastation, occasioned by traces of cataracts falling from their tops, presented to our view a scene truly sublime. Mr. *Fleetwood* felt an unusual elevation of spirit. His soul rose within him, and was swelled with that silent awe, so well suited to his contemplative mind. In the words of the poet, he could have said,

—"Welcome, kindred glooms,  
Congenial horrors, hail!  
—Be these my theme,  
These that exalt the soul to solemn thought,  
And Heavenly musing!" <sup>86</sup>

The literary criticism of the *Mirror* also exhibits a romantic attitude. In the paper entitled: "Advantage which the Artist in

<sup>85</sup> *Mirror*, No. 16.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 10.

the Fine Arts has over Nature in the Assemblage and Arrangement of Objects; exemplified in Milton's Allegro and Penseroso," the following passage occurs: "Verses may be polished, and may glow with excellent imagery; but unless, like the poems of Parnel, or the lesser poems of Milton, they please by their enchanting influence on the heart, and, by exciting feelings that are consistent, or of a similar tendency, they are never truly delightful." <sup>87</sup>

The *Mirror* was discontinued Saturday, May 27, 1780. Its demise was credited among other things, to Edinburgh's not having the same attraction for the reader as London. That this drawback was not a serious one is proved by the fact that five years later the same group of writers started the *Lounger* (February 5, 1785-January 6, 1787) which like the *Mirror* is a single essay periodical. In the first number, Mackenzie takes the reader into his confidence: "A Lounger of the sort I could wish to be thought, is one who, even amidst a certain intercourse with mankind, preserves a constant intimacy with himself; it is not, therefore, to be wondered at, if he should sometimes, if I may be allowed the expression, correspond with himself, and write down, if he can write at all, what he wishes this favourite companion more particularly to remark. Exactly of this sort are the notes and memorandums I have sometimes been tempted to make: transcripts of what I have felt or thought, or little records of what I have heard or read, set down without any other arrangement than what the disposition of the time might prompt. These little papers formed a kind of new society, which I could command at any time, without stirring from my fireside." <sup>88</sup>

The *Lounger*, like the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, deals with the lesser moralities: "The creed of custom is not always that of right; and it is the privilege of such a work, as well as one of its chief uses, to attack the intrenchments of fashion, whenever she is at war with modesty or virtue." <sup>89</sup> Present-day manners are contrasted with those of a former age by the clever fiction of the return of its

<sup>87</sup> *Mirror*, No. 24.

<sup>88</sup> *Lounger*, No. 1.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 2.

*eidolon*, Colonel Caustic, to society after a period of retirement, caused by an unhappy love affair. Such a person "is somewhat in the situation of the foreigner. Like him, he is apt to be misled by prejudices; but like him, too, he remarks many things which escape the observation of those whose sensations are blunted by habit, and whose attention is less awake to the objects around them."<sup>40</sup> Thus the device of the foreign spectator or critic is combined with that of the native countryman, by the simple expedient of making the *eidolon* a kind of Rip Van Winkle. Also, as in the earlier periodicals, special attention is given to the interests of its feminine readers. Mackenzie throws down his gauntlet, so to speak, and declares that "Every periodical writer, like every knight-errant of old, in assuming his office, is understood to swear fealty to the Ladies."<sup>41</sup> The character sketches in the *Lounger* are particularly well done. The art of drawing character seems to have especially interested Mackenzie and his fellow-workers, judging from an essay in the *Mirror*,<sup>42</sup> which carefully analyzes the different kinds of character-writing and points out the faults of each. Leigh Hunt in his *A Book for a Corner* quotes two character-sketches from the *Lounger*—those of the old lady and the old gentleman. Hunt's own sketches, on the same themes, were undoubtedly influenced by those in the *Lounger*.

The century closed without producing any periodicals which in content, style or form bring us closer to those of the nineteenth century. Imitations of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* continued to appear, but the material was becoming outworn. A contributor to the *Monthly Mirror* (1795) complains: "Periodical publications are daily coming into disgrace. The moral and intellectual world were never so enlightened and improved as when Addison, Steele, and others gave their lucubrations to the public. The form, the method, the system remained, but the animation, the genius, the soul were fled."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *Lounger*, No. 14.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 22.

<sup>42</sup> "Of the Art of Drawing Characters in Writing," *Mirror*, No. 31.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted from G. S. Marr, *Periodical Essayists of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 247.

Another writer, Vicesimus Knox, who published a collection of forty essays: *Winter Evenings, or Lucubrations on Life and Letters* in the last decade of the century, likewise notes the decline of periodical essays: "Diaries of belles and beaux, extraordinary intelligence, cross readings of newspapers, are now worn thread-bare. Indeed, every mode of humour, which the *Spectator* adopted, has been imitated so often as to have lost something of its grace."<sup>44</sup>

Toward the latter part of the century the essay serial appeared less and less as a separate publication, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century had virtually disappeared. The only important exception is Leigh Hunt's *Reflector* (1810-1811). The essay was taken over by the magazines and newspapers, which continued to increase in number if not in importance. Also, the rise of the novel, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, absorbed much of the attention of the reading public. Fiction was no longer regarded as fit only for entertainment, but was looked upon as a serious form of literature with a moral purpose. And the criticism of the novel in reviews and magazines called popular attention to this new literary form.

From this review of the essay in certain outstanding periodicals of the eighteenth century, it is apparent that all the forms which it took were developed in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. Moral, critical, "character," anecdotal, epistolary, autobiographic, and narrative essays, allegories, dreams, Oriental fantasies, "little novels"—had all made their appearance in the first quarter of the century. After that, the most significant contributions made to the essay in the course of the century consisted not in the development of new types, but in the romantic spirit which infused some of the papers, notably those of Goldsmith, Mackenzie and his circle, and in the effort to introduce a more serious note into the essay, to divorce it from the doings of the town, to widen the scope of its subject matter, and to get rid of the many stereotyped devices and "frames" which imitation rendered outworn. The failure to achieve entire success in freeing the essay in the latter half of the century from imitation of earlier models is somewhat difficult to understand, but may be partially accounted for by the fact that the reading

<sup>44</sup> "On Some Peculiarities in Periodical Essays," *Winter Evenings*, Lond., 1823, vol. I, p. 22.

public had acquired a taste for the essay periodical of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* type, and were dissatisfied when such writers as Johnson and Goldsmith made an effort to break away from the old devices.

Particularly important in its effect upon later essayists was the literary style of the periodical essay. Simplicity, urbanity, grace, intimacy may be said to characterize much of the essay-writing of the period. The clear style, which adapted itself to the subject in hand, the intimate relations established between essayist and reader, the wit and humor, the variety of subject matter, the excellent delineation of types, the concreteness lent by "characters," the use of quotations to adorn and enforce—these characteristics carried over into the familiar essay of the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER II

### THE TURN OF THE CENTURY: THE NEW PERIODICALS AND THEIR RELATION TO THE ESSAY

The essay in the eighteenth century had not only become established as one of the leading literary forms, but it had proved adaptable to practically all kinds of subject matter. Therefore the nineteenth century found at hand a form which admirably suited its needs. The spirit of the age demanded expression; many leavens had been at work since Addison's lucubrations upon Queen Anne society. Two great forces: the French and the Industrial Revolutions had stirred England politically, economically, socially and spiritually. She had witnessed the mighty spectacle of a nation no farther distant than the width of the Channel, shaking off the fetters of Church and State, and proclaiming a new freedom, whose contagion had spread with fire-like rapidity. In England the virus was all the more effective because of its native origin in the theories of Locke, Hobbes and Hume. Reinforced by the doctrines of Rousseau, Helvetius, Montesquieu and Diderot, the new freedom had been given added momentum by the cataclysm of revolution. Rousseau in his *Social Contract* had broken the idol of the divine right of kings, and set on foot educational reform through his *Emile*. Helvetius' theories reappeared in the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and his disciples, and gave impetus to needed social reforms. Holbach's doctrine of Necessity, the philosophical ideas flowing into England from Germany, the many questions raised by the French Encyclopedists, and new discoveries in science quickened men's minds and produced an intellectual ferment which sought satisfaction in reading and discussion. The application of machinery to industrial processes gave rise to new social and economic problems, and created a feeling of sympathy for the common man, caught in the maelstrom of conditions, with which he had no power to cope. The eighteenth century had wit-



nessed the rise of the middle class to a position of political and financial importance—the nineteenth century became “class conscious” of the laboring man, of whom Crabbe and Burns had sung, and whose tragic lot was poignantly expressed by Wordsworth. The dignity and worth of man as man asserted itself in the form of a strong individualism which became one of the dominant elements in the Romantic Revival. Poetry as well as prose was enlisted in the cause of liberty and justice. Wordsworth, hailed the French Revolution as the deliverer of mankind, and wrote an ode in which he declared carnage was God’s daughter<sup>1</sup>; Shelley, in his political allegory, *The Revolt of Islam*, “sought to enlist the harmony of metrical language . . . in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality,” and to kindle in the hearts of his readers “a virtuous enthusiasm for . . . doctrines of liberty and justice.”<sup>2</sup> Byron likewise turned his pen to the defense of liberty. Literature reflected current questions, and there was a rapidly forming reading public interested in these questions.

The multiplication of newspapers, magazines and reviews in the early part of the century was in answer to a direct demand on the part of the reading public. Hazlitt well suggests this when he says: “Knowledge is no longer confined to the few: the object therefore is, to make it accessible and attractive to the many. . . . We can no longer be churls of knowledge, ascetics in pretension. We must yield to the spirit of change (whether for the better or worse); and ‘to beguile the time, look like the time.’”<sup>3</sup> Besides the desire of people to keep informed on current questions, two other factors were responsible for the increase in the reading public: the extension of public education, and the improved methods used in printing and distributing newspapers, periodicals and books. The educational movement was greatly accelerated in the first half of the century. Half a million pupils were attending day schools in 1818, and by 1833 the number had doubled, the ratio being one day student to every eleven persons.<sup>4</sup> The “school master was abroad,”

<sup>1</sup> Ode No. XLV, *Poems dedicated to National Independence and Liberty*, ed. by Hutchinson, Oxford, 1895.

<sup>2</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley. *Complete Poetical Works*, Bost., 1901, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> “The Periodical Press,” *Works*, vol. x, p. 210.

<sup>4</sup> A. H. Thorndike, *Literature in a Changing Age*, N. Y., 1920, pp. 23-24.

as Lord Brougham declared. His "Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge," founded in 1827, was one of several which by means of low cost publications sought to make reading matter accessible to the masses. The Sunday school movement was another means by which popular education was promoted.

Coincident with the increased facilities for education was the use of steam power for printing. September 28, 1814, marks a new era in journalism for on that date the *London Times* was first printed on presses operated by steam, making it possible to produce eleven hundred impressions per hour. The result was the increase of the printed word at a rate which in some quarters was viewed with alarm. Hazlitt complains that "modern authorship is become a species of stenography: we contrive even to read by proxy. We skim the cream of prose without any trouble; we get at the quintessence of poetry without loss of time. The staple commodity, the coarse, heavy, dirty, unwieldly bullion of books is driven out of the market of learning, and the intercourse of the literary world is carried on, and the credit of great capitalists sustained by the flimsy circulating medium of magazines and reviews."<sup>5</sup>

Lamb also notes the change that the increase in magazines and reviews brought about: "Times are altered now. We are all readers; our young men are split up into so many book-clubs, knots of literati; we criticise; we read the *Quarterly* and *Edinburgh* . . . and instead of the old, honest, unpretending illiterature so becoming to our profession—we read and *judge* of everything. . . . We read to say that we have read."<sup>6</sup>

The early nineteenth century was an age of paradoxes. Amid the welter of politics, false philosophies, economic experiments and governmental evils, there was produced some of the finest imaginative literature in the English tongue. The familiar essay came to its perfection in journals given largely to political and personal animosities—and in the same person we find the urbane, graceful and self-revealing familiar essayist, and the political partisan who dipped his pen in acid when he wrote of his enemies.

We have already seen how the eighteenth century essay was

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<sup>5</sup> "Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth," *Works*, v. 5, p. 319.

<sup>6</sup> "Readers against the Grain," *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. by E. V. Lucas, Lond., 1905, vol. 1, p. 273.

shaped by the social conditions of its time and by the periodicals in which it appeared. The same is true of the familiar essay in the succeeding century; it was a product of the spirit of the age, and of the printed mediums which sponsored it.

The nineteenth century literary periodicals were one of the main influences in the development of the familiar essay. Among the factors which affected this development may be mentioned: (1) the additional space afforded. The earlier news sheets by their size limited the length to which the essay might run; the *Rambler* essays, for example, occupied regularly six folio pages. The *Tatler* and *Spectator* papers were limited by the folio half sheet upon which they were printed. The older magazines such as the *Gentleman's*, which carried over into the new century, were so crowded with miscellaneous information that little space was left for literary features. The periodicals of the nineteenth century that took literature for their province devoted a large proportion of their space, varying from a few pages to as many as twenty-two, to their essay features, thus enabling the essayist to expand his ideas. (2) The new literary periodicals reached a wider and more cosmopolitan reading public than had their predecessors. In the eighteenth century the essay serials had addressed themselves, as we have already noted, to a limited audience. In the next century, increased educational advantages enabled more men to read than ever before, and this enlarged the scope of the essay in theme and treatment. This was particularly true of the familiar essay, which directed its attention to no particular class or party, but ranging over a multiplicity of themes, appealed to the abiding interests of mankind. (3) The literary periodicals of the nineteenth century put greater emphasis upon literature, drama, the fine arts and criticism than had been possible in the narrow confines of the so-called "literary" periodicals of the preceding age. They set a high standard of excellence in writing, attracted to their pages the best literary talent of the time, and proved an inspirational force in developing authors who with the decline of literary patronage might otherwise have failed to find a hearing. They acted as a "proving ground" where a literary work might be tried out upon the public before its appearance in book form. This was particularly the case with regard to the familiar essay. The majority of the essays of Lamb,

Hazlitt and Hunt appeared first in periodicals, and one of the "Imaginary Conversations" of Landor had its initial publication in the *London Magazine* to gauge its appeal to the public. Another stimulus was provided by the rivalry which sometimes existed among the contributors to the same or rival periodicals. Editors were urged to their best efforts by keen competition, and the essay achieved new standards in style and content.

The nineteenth century literary periodicals trace their family tree back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but in form and content they differed from their predecessors in a degree to warrant description, particularly those in which the familiar essay appeared. The work of the familiar essayists was confined to no one type of literary periodical, but appeared in reviews, magazines, and weekly journals of belles-lettres, in successors to the essay periodical such as Leigh Hunt's *Reflector*, and sometimes in newspapers. The form and content of these periodicals are interesting in relation to the essay types which they contained. The following comments make no attempt to group the periodicals by type, but rather to follow chronologically the development of the familiar essay in their pages.

The establishment of the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*, in 1802 and 1809 respectively was a notable event in literary history, but it had no immediate effect upon the development of the familiar essay. Indirectly, however, it pointed the way to the establishment of a distinctly literary periodical, the *Reflector*, which first appeared in October, 1810. Its founder was Leigh Hunt, who was not only instrumental in developing the familiar essay, but provided the early vehicles for it. Hunt, who had for some time been associated with his brother John as editor of the *Examiner*, a weekly free lance political organ, now turned his journalistic ability to the conduct of a two-hundred page quarterly devoted to philosophy, politics and the liberal arts. Among the contributors were George Dyer, Barron Field, Dr. John Aikin, O. G. Gilchrist, Thomas Barnes and Charles Lamb, most of whom had been at Christ's Hospital where Leigh Hunt was educated. In a Prospectus Hunt announced that the *Reflector* was needed because "reform of periodical writing is as much wanted in Magazines as it was formerly in Reviews, and still is in Newspapers."

The old magazines were "notoriously in their dotage," and the new ones "returned to the infancy of their species—to pattern-drawing, doll-dressing, and a song about Phillis." He sums up the contents of these "flimsy publications" as "a little fashionable biography; some remarks at length on eating, drinking or dressing; an anecdote or two; a design or two for handkerchiefs and settees; a country-dance; a touch of botany; a touch of politics; a touch of criticism, a faux pas; and a story *to be continued*, like those of the Improvvisatori, who throw down their hats at an interesting point and must be paid more to proceed." Hunt's first aim in the *Reflector*, he declares, will be to avoid the grosser faults of magazines, and to write "a Chronicle for posterity." Politics will be included because "*they are now, in their turn, exhibiting their re-action upon literature, as literature in the preceding age exhibited its action upon them.*" Dramatic criticism and the fine arts are not to be neglected, but the principal feature of the *Reflector* is to be "*Miscellaneous Literature*, consisting of Essays on Men and Manners, Enquiries into past and present Literature, and all subjects relative to Wit, Morals, and a true Refinement. There will be no direct Review of Books, but new works, as far as they regard the character of the times, will meet with passing notice; and occasional articles will be written to shew the peculiar faults or beauties, injuriousness or utility, of such as have strongly attracted the public attention."<sup>7</sup>

Hunt epitomized the purpose of the *Reflector* when he said it was to reveal "the mind" of the times. It succeeded in giving a lively survey of metropolitan movements, but its crowning achievement was the essays of Charles Lamb. As Mr. Blunden has observed, Lamb was given a latitude in the *Reflector* which did not consist in liberality of space alone.<sup>8</sup> Here for the first time, if we are to judge from his previous discouragements, Lamb had opportunity to exercise his talent not only in criticism, but in the form with which he was experimenting—the familiar essay. "The *Reflector*," says Mr. Lucas, "gave Lamb his first encouragement to spread his

<sup>7</sup> The *Reflector*, a quarterly magazine on subjects of philosophy, politics and the liberal arts; conducted by the ed. of the *Examiner*, v. I, Oct., 1810 to Dec., 1811. Lond., 1811, pref. pp. iii-ix.

<sup>8</sup> Edmund Blunden, *Leigh Hunt and His Circle*, N. Y., 1930, p. 60.

wings with some of the freedom that an essayist demands. . . . It is not too much to say that had he lacked the preliminary training which his *Reflector* exercises gave him his *Elia* essays would have been the poorer."<sup>9</sup>

Lamb contributed fifteen papers to the *Reflector*, the last number of which contained seven of his essays. These *Reflector* papers are particularly interesting because of the progress they indicate in Lamb's development as a critical and a familiar essayist. "On the Character and Genius of Hogarth," "On Garrick and Acting; and the Plays of Shakespeare considered with reference to their Fitness for Stage Presentation" are conceded to be among Lamb's best work. These essays, aside from their remarkable critical faculty, are evidence that he had already achieved a distinguished, highly personal and flexible style, obedient to every turn of his thought. In these critical essays he also reveals a faculty which later was to make his familiar essays so delightful—the ability to let his mind play over a subject, and illuminate it in unexpected ways, as when he says of Hogarth: "Other pictures we look at, his prints we read." Lamb's essays in familiar vein contributed to the *Reflector* include "A Bachelor's Complaint of the Behaviour of Married People," "Edax on Appetite," "*Hospita* on the Immoderate Indulgence of the Pleasures of the Palate," "The Good Clerk, a Character," "On Burial Societies; and the Character of an Undertaker," and "On the Inconveniences Resulting from being Hanged." These papers show a close affinity to those of the *Spectator*, in their use of the letter form and the "character." In interest and power of expression, they are inferior to Lamb's critical essays, but they are of exceeding value in a study of the development of the familiar essay. They are proof that Lamb did not immediately strike the rich vein of his style as a familiar essayist, although in "Rosamund Gray" and in "The Londoner" he had given promise of the style which he was later to develop. That Lamb for his essay form should have gone back to Steele and Addison is the more interesting since he was under no restrictions in writing for the *Reflector*.<sup>10</sup>

It was in the *Reflector* that Hunt first showed his ability as a familiar essayist in his "A Day by the Fire." Here are pictured

<sup>9</sup> E. V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb*, N. Y., 1905, vol. I, p. 373.

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion of Lamb's *Reflector* essays see pp. 68-70.

the joys of the fireside at all hours of the day. The continual play of ideas upon the same theme, the many angles from which the writer views his subject, and the sustained fancy prove not the amateur trying his hand, but the finished essayist. Not only the essayist but the poet speaks, even though the medium is prose. The "charming current of personal sensation and thought," the self-revealing mood of the essayist, is what lends the essay its chief distinction. Hunt's other contributions to the *Reflector* likewise display a mastery of prose style, and a freedom and originality in critical opinion which was of inestimable value in an age when criticism was infused with personal and political animosity.

In December, 1811, with the publication of the fourth number, the *Reflector* was discontinued owing chiefly to lack of funds, but it had achieved a result greater than any its founder could have foreseen. It had brought Leigh Hunt and Lamb together, it had served as the cradle of the familiar essay in the nineteenth century, and in the history of periodicals it marked the fusion of the essay serial and the new type of review. That Hunt was making a conscious effort to supplant the old type of "literary" periodical is evident from the Prospectus, which clearly indicates the low estate to which periodical writing had been brought, and the need for reform.

The *Examiner*, a sixteen-page weekly periodical, was begun by Hunt and his brother John in 1808 as a "Sunday Paper, on Politics, Domestic Economy and Theatricals." Although primarily devoted to politics, it dealt with philosophy, poetry, criticism, statesmanship, ethics and theology, which Hunt humorously remarks, "all took a final tone in my lips."<sup>11</sup> It had for its object, in addition to parliamentary reform, "liberality of opinion in general . . . and a fusion of literary taste into all subjects whatsoever."<sup>12</sup> The *Examiner* owed its name to the paper of Swift and his fellow Tories. "I did not think of their politics," Hunt says. "I thought only of their wit and fine writing, which, in my youthful confidence, I proposed to myself to emulate; and I could find no previous political journal qualified to be its godfather."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 155.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

Lamb was represented in the pages of the *Examiner*, but not as a familiar essayist. Besides several poems and epigrams he supplied a number of short articles under the head of "Table Talk" (1813), and in 1814 a paper on a play by Kenney as well as a poem on Jordan's acting. Hazlitt was added to the list of contributors to the *Examiner*, in 1814, during which year appeared his essays "On Posthumous Fame," "On Hogarth's Marriage-a-la-Mode," his review of Wordsworth's "Excursion," and "On the Love of Nature," the mystical elements of which have been compared to Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality." Meanwhile Hunt was practically the chief contributor to the *Examiner*, for which, in addition to political articles and theatrical criticism, he wrote his suburban essays, a series of political satires in doggerel verse, and "Sonnets on Hampstead."

The most important contribution of the *Examiner* to the familiar essay was the establishment of its Round Table column in 1815. In the opening number of the series Hunt explained that the writers would not assume fictitious characters; that they were "literally speaking, a small party of friends, who meet once a week at a Round Table to discuss the merits of a leg of mutton and of the subjects upon which we are to write." He gives his reason for doing away with the *eidolons* of the periodical essayists: "A hundred years back, when the mode of living was different from what it is now, and taverns and coffee-houses made the persons of the wits familiar to every body, assumptions of this kind may have been necessary. *Captain Steele*, for instance, the gay fellow about town, might not always have been listened to with becoming attention, or even gravity, especially if he had been a little too inarticulate overnight;—he therefore put on the wrinkles and privileges of *Isaac Bickerstaff*, the old gentleman. . . . We have not the same occasion for disguise; and, therefore, as we prefer at all times a plain, straight-forward behaviour, and, in fact, choose to be as original as we can in our productions, we have avoided the trouble of adding assumed characters to our real ones; and shall talk, just as we think, walk and take dinner, in our own proper persons." <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *The Round Table: A Collection of Essays on Literature, Men, and Manners*, by William Hazlitt, Edinburgh, 1817, vol. I, No. 1.



This decision to do away with a device which had long been a feature of the periodical essay, marks an important departure. The intimate relation between writer and reader was not only maintained, but was made a still closer one by the essayist speaking in his own person. In this same paper Hunt also speaks of the Round Table writers' intention "to avoid the solitary and dictatorial manner" of the periodical essayists, and "without any sort of formality" to let "the stream of conversation wander through any ground it pleases."<sup>15</sup> In the second paper of the series, Hunt again emphasizes the informal nature of the "Round Table." The "conversation" is to be "casual and unconstrained," and "sometimes of the character of table-talk." "The same article may contain a variety of subjects, and start off from one point to another with as unshackled and extemporaneous an enjoyment as one of Montaigne's."<sup>16</sup>

The "friends" who were to sit at the "Round Table" were Barnes, Hazlitt and Hunt himself, but Barnes was unable to carry his share in the enterprise. The subjects to be treated were "Manners, Morals and Taste," and it was hoped that something of the chivalric glory of King Arthur and his knights might be revived. In addition to the essays which deserve the appellation "familiar," the material of the "Round Table" covered such topics as classical education, the value of life, the unreasonableness of women, human caprice and melancholy, Steele's *Tatler*, a tribute to Milton, modernizing Chaucer, ridicule of Methodists, thoughts on death, the doctrine of eternal necessity, the Malthusian theory. It is interesting to note that the familiar essay in the nineteenth century was thus appearing in the midst of diverse material. Its importance as a new literary type was scarcely yet appreciated, and it was still engaged in the process of divorcing itself from earlier models.

In 1816 Hunt contributed to the "Round Table" three character sketches, two of which "The Old Lady" and "The Maid-Servant" are among his most popular essays. Others of his written in the familiar mood which appeared in the "Round Table" are "Washerwomen," "On the Night-mare," a dream fantasy, and "A Day by the Fire," which had previously been printed in the *Reflector*.

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<sup>15</sup> Op. cit., vol. I, No. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., vol. I, No. 2.

Hazlitt in his Round Table papers wrote more frequently in a reasoned and critical manner, than in a familiar style. His first essay, for example, "On the Love of Life," argues that the strength of our attachment to human life "is a very fallacious test of its happiness." It is adorned with quotations from Addison, Jeremy Taylor, Milton and others. Antithesis so fancied by the older essayists, is used with telling effect, but the essay lacks imagination and self-revelation. The majority of these papers by Hazlitt enter "into the meaning and logic of things; into causes and results; into motives and indications of character," but it is possible to discern a romantic and impassioned feeling which was later to become characteristic of Hazlitt as a familiar essayist. For instance, "On the Love of the Country" contains passages in praise of nature written in a romantic manner. The "Round Table" is important, as marking the emergence of Hazlitt as a familiar, or miscellaneous essayist, for in spite of the fact that many of his contributions to it were critical papers, his other contributions mark a distinct departure from his earlier parliamentary, dramatic and critical writings in other periodicals.

Hazlitt's development as a familiar essayist was undoubtedly hastened by a series of events which threw the burden of writing the Round Table upon him. He himself tells us how he came to be the sole support of the project: "Our plan had been no sooner arranged and entered upon, than Buonaparte landed at Frejus, *et voilà la Table Ronde dissoute*. Our little congress was broken up as well as the great one: Politics called off the attention of the Editor from the Belles Lettres; and the task of continuing the work fell chiefly upon the person who was least able to give life and spirit to the original design."<sup>17</sup> Leigh Hunt had been released from prison February 3, 1815; in the following month Napoleon returned from Elba. His landing at Frejus thus indirectly bears upon the development of the essay.

The "Round Table" terminated January 5, 1817. In the same year Hazlitt had reprinted in book form a collection of essays contributed to the Round Table column in the *Examiner*, and to other periodicals. In the preface he states that out of the fifty-

<sup>17</sup> "Advertisement" to *The Round Table*, vol. I. Edinburgh, 1817.

two numbers only twelve are Hunt's and for the remainder he alone is responsible.

In December 1818 Hazlitt began to write for Constable's *Edinburgh Magazine*. Here appeared "On Nicknames"; "On Respectable People"; "On the Question Whether Pope was a Poet"; "Remarks on Mr. West's Picture of Death on the Pale Horse." Of Hazlitt's essays other than critical in the *Edinburgh Magazine*, that "On Fashion" (September, 1818) warrants attention. In theme it is an echo of a favorite topic with the periodical essayists. But there the likeness ends. One has only to read Steele on the same subject<sup>18</sup> to realize the distance the essay has traveled. Where, in the eighteenth century essay periodicals can such "lucubrations" on fashion as the following be found? "Fashion is the abortive issue of vain ostentation and exclusive egotism: it is haughty, trifling, affected, servile, despotic, mean, and ambitious, precise and fantastical, all in a breath—tied to no rule, and bound to conform to every whim of the minute. 'The fashion of an hour old mocks the wearer.' It is a sublimated essence of levity, caprice, vanity, extravagance, idleness, and selfishness. It thinks of nothing but not being contaminated by vulgar use, and winds and doubles like a hare, and betakes itself to the most paltry shifts to avoid being overtaken by the common hunt that are always in full chase after it. It contrives to keep up its fastidious pretensions, not by the difficulty of the attainment, but by the rapidity and evanescent nature of the changes."<sup>19</sup>

"On Nicknames" (*Edinburgh Magazine*, September, 1818) is too much heated by the ardour of reform to take its place among the familiar essays whose chief aim is to give pleasure, but it is an excellent example of the manner in which Hazlitt could play endless variations on the same theme, and reinforce his ideas by quotation and example drawn from literature and the fine arts. There is nothing quite like this ability in the periodical essayists. It was not simply the result of learning and wide reading; if so Addison and Johnson would have possessed it. Neither does the spirit of the age entirely account for it. It seems rather to have been a matter of individual genius.

<sup>18</sup> *Guardian*, No. 10.

<sup>19</sup> *Works*, vol. XI, p. 438.

Although Hunt was instrumental in fostering the literary genius of Hazlitt and Lamb, their most mature work, or much of it, appeared not in Hunt's periodicals, but in a literary miscellany, the *London Magazine*, which was founded in 1820 under the editorship of John Scott, a brilliant journalist. The *London* represented the best type of the modern literary periodical and under the guidance of Scott became one of the leading critical journals. It began as a hundred-and-eighteen page miscellany, issued monthly, and aimed to present "sound principles in questions of taste, morals and politics." It also aimed to express the new cosmopolitan spirit, and gave space to foreign criticism and literature, and to "the theories and progress of the fine arts in the various national schools of Europe."<sup>20</sup>

Brief as was the *London's* career, it has been adjudged in its early years "richer in good authors and enduring literature than any other English magazine has been before or since."<sup>21</sup> Its fame, if it had nothing else to assure it, would be handed down to posterity because of Lamb's "Essays of Elia," De Quincey's "Confessions of an Opium Eater" and some of Hazlitt's "Table Talk" which appeared in its pages. The *London* not only set a high standard of literary criticism, and contained some of the best writing of the period, but also proved a patron of new authors. It launched De Quincey and Tom Hood upon their literary careers, and undoubtedly played a very definite part in fostering Lamb's literary powers. Its contributors met together at intervals, and the resulting exchange of ideas must frequently have fired many latent sparks of genius. Hood in his *Literary Reminiscences* has given a delightful picture of the dinners of the *London* group which included besides himself,—Lamb, Hazlitt, De Quincey, Carlyle, Henry Francis Cary, the translator of Dante, B. W. Proctor, Allan Cunningham, Thomas Hood, George Darley, John Clare, the peasant poet of Northamptonshire, Hartley Coleridge, Thomas Noon Talfourd, Horace Smith, J. H. Reynolds and Bernard Barton, the Quaker poet.

<sup>20</sup> See Prospectus to the first number of the *London Magazine*.

<sup>21</sup> F. E. Pierce, *Currents and Eddies in the English Romantic Generation*, New Haven, 1918, p. 199.

Between his contributions to the *Reflector* in 1811 and his work for the *London*, Lamb produced little in the familiar essay genre worthy of note, but in his Elia essays many of which appeared in the *London Magazine* from August, 1820, to August, 1825, he did his greatest work. During this period he wrote but little for any other periodical, and after 1826 he practically ceased writing except for three or four papers which appeared in the *Englishman's Magazine* in 1831.

To the *London Magazine* Hazlitt contributed some of his most characteristic work as an essayist. He wrote for it regularly from June, 1820, to December, 1821, and his work and Lamb's often appeared in the same issue. Hazlitt had introduced Lamb to Scott and, according to Talfourd, Hazlitt prevailed on Lamb to enter into a friendly rivalry with him. Hazlitt's first essay "On the Qualifications Necessary to Success in Life" was printed in the June, 1820, issue, and Lamb's first Elia essay, "Recollections of the South Sea House" appeared two months later. Echoes of the essayists' "rivalry" have come down to us. In a letter from Hazlitt to Scott (dated by W. C. Hazlitt April 12, 1820) we read "Do you keep the Past and Future? You see Lamb argues the same view of the subject. That 'young master' will anticipate all my discoveries, if I don't mind."<sup>22</sup> It is fairly certain, as Mr. Bertram Dobell has pointed out,<sup>23</sup> that Hazlitt had Lamb's "New Year's Eve" in mind, for it contains lines of thought similar to "On the Past and Future," and also has the phrase "young master" in it. Lamb's essay, however, did not appear in the *London* until January, 1821, and Mr. E. V. Lucas is at a loss to account for the disparity in the date of Hazlitt's letter and that of publication of the essay, except by the supposition that the letter is undated or indistinctly dated, and that W. C. Hazlitt conjectured the date. It seems more than likely that Hazlitt had seen Lamb's essay in manuscript, a supposition which has been discredited because he was not on good terms with Lamb at the time. "On the Past and Future" appeared in *Table Talk* in 1821. Hazlitt's essay, "On the Fear of Death," published in *Table Talk*, vol. II, 1822, also

<sup>22</sup> W. C. Hazlitt, *Four Generations of a Literary Family*, Lond. and N. Y., 1897, vol. I, p. 140.

<sup>23</sup> Bertram Dobell. *Sidelights on Charles Lamb*, Lond., 1903, p. 213.

contains passages which bear close resemblance to those in "New Year's Eve." It is unwise in such a case to attempt to determine indebtedness. Coleridge thought Hazlitt was more indebted to Lamb for ideas that Lamb was to Hazlitt, but on the other hand Hazlitt anticipated Lamb's ideas on several occasions. The free exchange of thought between these two friends is more interesting than important in its effect. Two of the best of Hazlitt's familiar essays, "On the Conversation of Authors" and "On Reading Old Books" appeared in the *London Magazine*, September 1820, and February 1821, respectively. In February 1821, Scott was killed in a duel, the outcome of his remarks against *Blackwoods* in the *London Magazine*. Baldwin, publisher of the *London*, called upon Hazlitt's aid in the emergency, and he wrote the editorial notes for the April number and four articles for the May issue. In May, 1821, Hazlitt was offered the editorship of the *London* and declined it.<sup>24</sup> He continued however as a contributor, and during the fall of 1821 wrote "On a Landscape of Nicolas Poussin," "Why Distant Objects Please," and "On Coffee-House Politicians"; in 1822-23 he contributed several papers on picture galleries.

Hazlitt's essays in the *London*, such as "On Reading Old Books," "On the Conversation of Authors," and "On Coffee-House Politicians" show a familiar and self-revelatory quality that contrasts with the reasoned style of his earlier essays. It is true that he had indulged in the mood of impassioned recollection in some of his previous papers, but the familiar note was not long sustained. As in the essay on fashion, Hazlitt again makes use of a periodical essay theme in "On Coffee-House Politicians." Portions of it, however, might have been written by Lamb himself, particularly those "thumb-nail" sketches of eccentric characters: "there was old S——, tall and gaunt, with his couplet from Pope and case at Nisi Prius, M—— eyeing the ventilator and lying *perdu* for a moral, and H—— and A—— taking another friendly finishing glass! These and many more wind-falls of character he gave us in thought, word and action. . . . Oh! it was a rich treat to see him describe M-df-rd, him of the Courier, the Contemplative Man, who wrote an answer to Coelebs, coming into a room, folding up his

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<sup>24</sup> P. P. Howe, *Life of William Hazlitt*, Lond., n.d., p. 326.

great coat, taking out a little pocket volume, laying it down to think, rubbing the calf of his leg with grave self-complacency, and starting out of his reverie when spoken to with an inimitable vapid exclamation of 'Eh! M-df-rd is like a man made of fleecy hosiery: R—— was lack and lean 'as is the ribbed seasand.' " <sup>25</sup>

If such a passage suggests the drawing of character in Lamb's "Old Benchers of the Inner Temple" <sup>26</sup> even more does Lamb's essay "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading," which appeared in the *London Magazine*, July, 1822, remind us of Hazlitt's paper "On Reading Old Books," which had appeared in the previous year. Without doubt an added impetus was given to the development of the familiar essay by the association of Lamb and Hazlitt in the *London Magazine*.

Another magazine to which Hunt, Hazlitt and Lamb contributed was the *New Monthly*. Under the name of the *New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register* it had been founded by Henry Colburn in 1814, in opposition to the "Jacobinism" of the *Monthly Magazine and British Register* (1796-1843). The varied content of the one hundred and twenty pages, which constituted each issue, has been compared to such a miscellany as the *Gentleman's Magazine*. In 1820, under the editorship of Thomas Campbell, it became the *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, a change in name indicative of its more literary character. Campbell contributed to it his own poetical work, and attracted to its pages such well-known writers as Thomas Noon Talfourd, Douglas Jerrold and Bernard Barton.

Leigh Hunt began to contribute to the *New Monthly* in 1821. Under date of September 1, 1824, he wrote his sister-in-law, Elizabeth Kent: "I have had a fourth offer from Colburn to write for the *New Monthly Magazine*, which by the way looks well for my present standing with the public." <sup>27</sup> Among his contributions which extended over a number of years, were essays, poems, "conversations," and translations,—a variety similar to that of his own magazines. In 1825 he contributed a series of papers,

<sup>25</sup> *Works*, vol. VI, pp. 195-96.

<sup>26</sup> *London Magazine*, Sept., 1821.

<sup>27</sup> *Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, ed. by his eldest son, Lond., 1862, vol. I, p. 232.

"The Family Journal," which he signed "Will Honeycomb." The dialogue form in which the "Journal" is written may have been suggested by Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*, the first two volumes of which were published in 1824. Hunt seems to have been experimenting with the "conversation" or dialogue style of essay, for in 1825 he also contributed to the *New Monthly*, "Conversations of Pope," "The Conversation of Swift and Pope," and "The Dialogue with a Sportsman."

Lamb's first contribution to the *New Monthly* was "The Illustrious Defunct" (January, 1825). A year later on January first he began his "Popular Fallacies," which appeared regularly until September, 1826. With regard to the "Fallacies" Lamb wrote Bernard Barton (February, 1826): "I poke-out a monthly crudity for Colburn in his magazine, which I call 'Popular Fallacies,' and periodically crush a proverb or two, setting up my folly against the wisdom of nations."<sup>28</sup> The idea of this series of papers had been suggested to Lamb by the *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, or *Discourse of Vulgar Errors* by Sir Thomas Browne, one of his favorite writers. Two of the "Popular Fallacies" were afterwards made into essays: "The Sanity of True Genius" and "The Genteel Style in Writing." Lamb's contributions to the *New Monthly*, like Hunt's, were not among his most distinctive work.

Hazlitt, on the other hand, wrote for the *New Monthly* one of his best familiar essays "On Going a Journey"<sup>29</sup> which appeared under the head *Table Talk*. Other essays of his under the same caption were: "On Great and Little Things" (No. II, 1822) and "On Sonnets" (No. III, 1822). From 1822 until his death in 1830, Hazlitt was a more or less regular contributor to the *New Monthly*. Like Hunt, he tried his hand at the "Conversation" and wrote a series of papers, "The Conversations of James Northcote" (I-VI) which were published from August, 1826, to March, 1827, in the *New Monthly* under the title of "Boswell Redivivus." They were accompanied by an explanatory note by Hazlitt, in which he acknowledges his debt to Leigh Hunt: "My Dialogues are done much upon the same principle as the *Family Journal*: I shall be

<sup>28</sup> *Works*, vol. VII, p. 699.

<sup>29</sup> *Table Talk*, No. I, *New Monthly Magazine*, vol. IV, 1822.



more than satisfied if they are thought to possess but half the spirit and verisimilitude." <sup>80</sup>

Two of Hazlitt's essays: "My First Acquaintance with Poets" and "Shakespear's Fools" appeared in Leigh Hunt's and Byron's *Liberal* (1822-23), issued under tragic auspices, for Shelley, who was to have been its guiding spirit, did not live to participate in it. It was "Printed by and for John Hunt," and ended with the fourth number, because of Byron's defection and its want of financial success. Its plan was disclosed by Leigh Hunt in the preface to the first number: "The object of our work is not political, except inasmuch as all writing now-a-days must involve something to that effect, the connexion between politics and all other subjects of interest to mankind having been discovered, never again to be done away. We wish to do our work quietly, if people will let us,—to contribute our liberalities in the shape of Poetry, Essays, Tales, Translations, and other amenities, of which kings themselves may read and profit, if they are not afraid of seeing their own faces in every species of inkstand. Italian Literature, in particular, will be a favourite subject with us; and so was German and Spanish to have been, till we lost the accomplished Scholar and Friend who was to share our task; but perhaps we may be able to get a supply of the scholarship, though not of the friendship. It may be our good fortune to have more than one foreign correspondent, who will be an acquisition to the reader. In the meantime, we must do our best by ourselves; and the reader may be assured he shall have all that is in us, clear and candid at all events, if nothing else; for

We love to pour out all ourselves as plain  
As downright Shippen or as old Montaigne." <sup>81</sup>

Charles Brown, James Hogg, Mary Shelley, Horace Smith were among the contributors to the *Liberal*, but the greater part of it was written by Leigh Hunt. Unfortunately, Hunt, owing to ill health, and the grief occasioned by Shelley's death, was not at his best. He displayed his versatility, however, in the range of his contributions, which included essays, fables, translations from

<sup>80</sup> *Works*, vol. VI, p. 506 (notes).

<sup>81</sup> Preface to the *Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South*. 2 vols. Lond., 1822: Printed by and for John Hunt, 22 Old Bond Street. (p. vii)

Ariosto and other Italian poets, two long satirical poems, "The Dogs" and "The Book of Beginnings" in the style and meter of "Don Juan," "Letters from Abroad," giving his first impressions of Italy, and a paper "Rhyme and Reason" in which he contended that the "reason" of much modern poetry was contained wholly in its rhymes.

It is more interesting, perhaps, than important in the development of the essay, to find the work of Hazlitt and Hunt in conjunction with Byron's "Heaven and Earth," his "Vision of Judgment" which Hunt called "the best satire since the days of Pope," and Shelley's exquisite song "I Arise from Dreams of Thee,"<sup>82</sup> his beautiful translation, the "May-Day Night" from Goethe, and his "Lines to a Critic."

The storm of criticism and invective which greeted the *Liberal* is indicative of the strong partisan feeling and animosity which permeated the periodical literature of the time.

Leigh Hunt is to be seen at his best as a familiar essayist in his contributions to the *Indicator* and its successor, *The Companion*. The *Indicator*, edited by Hunt, was begun on the 13th of October, 1819, and continued until March 21, 1821, when his connection with it ceased.<sup>83</sup> This periodical was a weekly eight-page sheet issued on Thursdays, price twopence, and of it Hunt wrote to the Shelleys with his usual exuberance: "I have now a new periodical work in hand, in addition to the *Examiner*. . . . It is to be called the *Indicator*, after a bird of that name who shows people where to find wild honey; and will, in fact, be nothing but a collection of very short pieces of remark, biography, ancient fictions, &c.; in short, of any subjects that come to hand, and of which I shall endeavour to *extract the essence* for the reader. It will have nothing temporary whatsoever in it, political or critical; and indeed will be as pleasant labour to me as I can have, poetry always excepted." In the same letter Hunt asks Shelley to contribute a paragraph "now and then, as little startling at *first* as possible to vulgar prejudices."<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup> "Song, Written for an Indian Air," *Liberal*, No. 2.

<sup>83</sup> A new series commenced on March 28, 1821, and ended on October 13, 1821.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from Leigh Hunt to P. B. and M. W. Shelley written Sept. 20, 1819. In *Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, vol. 1, p. 149.

The discontinuance of the *Indicator* in 1821 was due to Hunt's ill health. In the last number under his editorship (March 21, 1821 he wrote his "Farewell" in characteristic vein "He has generally had," he says, "to perform his task without books, often with little comfort but the performance, always in the midst of a struggle of some sort." There are further reflections of this struggle in Hunt's *Autobiography* where we learn that the *Indicator* papers and his translation of the *Aminta* of Tasso tided him over a financial crisis "caused by the falling off in the receipts of the *Examiner* . . . declining under the twofold vicissitude of triumphant ascendancy in the Tories, and the desertion of reform by the Whigs." <sup>85</sup>

It is cause for wonder that, beset by ill-health and financial distress, Hunt could have produced, while writing under continued pressure, essays of such high merit and urbanity of spirit as those of the *Indicator*. That these papers were favorites with Lamb, Hazlitt, Keats and Shelley, we know from his *Autobiography*: "Let me console myself a little by remembering how much Hazlitt and Lamb, and others, were pleased with the *Indicator*. . . . Hazlitt's favourite paper (for they liked it enough to have favourite papers) was the one on *Sleep* . . . Lamb preferred the paper on *Coaches and Their Horses*, that on the *Deaths of Little Children*, and (I think) the one entitled *Thoughts and Guesses on Human Nature*. Shelley took to the story of the *Fair Revenge*; and the paper that was most liked by Keats, if I remember, was the one on a hot summer's day, entitled *A Now*. He was with me while I was writing and reading it to him, and contributed one or two of the passages." <sup>86</sup> Keats further assisted Hunt by contributing to the *Indicator* his "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (May 10, 1820), and the sonnet "A Dream after reading Dante's Episode of Paulo and Francesca" (June 28, 1820). That the intimacy between Hunt and Keats was a very close one at this time, is to be gathered from the fact that they lived together, in Mortimer Terrace, Kentish Town. Lamb is represented by three short articles in the *Indicator* (December 13, 1820), all of which had previously ap-

<sup>85</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 249.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 249-50.

peared in the *Examiner*: "Books with one Idea in Them," "Gray's Bard" and "Play-House Memoranda."

Hunt continued his essays<sup>87</sup> in the *Literary Examiner*, founded by John Hunt, July 5, 1823. It was a sixteen-page periodical, published each Saturday, which consisted of an essay, book reviews, poetry and other literary matter. For this work Hunt, in addition to the essays he contributed, translated Redi's *Bacco in Toscana*. Owing to his ill health, however, the *Literary Examiner* came to a close with the twenty-sixth number dated December 27, 1823.

The real successor to the *Indicator* was Leigh Hunt's *Companion*, which appeared weekly every Wednesday from January 9th to July 23, 1828. Beginning with the fifth number it increased from eight to sixteen pages, and became a close competitor of the *Athenaeum*. It consisted of a series of essays by Hunt in the manner of the *Indicator*, theatrical and literary criticism, and notices of public events. In it appeared some of Hunt's most charming familiar essays, including "An Earth Upon Heaven," and "Walks Home by Night."

Both the *Indicator* and the *Companion* were later reprinted with some omissions in book form, with the sub-title "A Miscellany for the Fields and the Fire-side."

The efforts made by John and Leigh Hunt to develop the journal of belles-lettres are an interesting chapter both in the history of the essay and in that of the periodical. As has already been noted the nineteenth century periodicals reached a comparatively wide reading public. It was the desire of Leigh Hunt to appeal to a still wider circle of readers in his journals. As he himself says, he wished "to extend an acquaintance with matters of intellectual refinement among the uneducated."<sup>88</sup> He disputes with Mr. Robert Chambers, the editor of the *Edinburgh Journal*, Chambers' claim that he and his brother were the originators of cheap, respectable literature, by reminding him that the appearance of the *Tatler* (Leigh Hunt's) was antecedent to that of the *Edinburgh*. The *Indicator*, the *Tatler*, and Leigh Hunt's *London Journal* were all planned with the idea of appealing to those with little education,

<sup>87</sup> His essays in the *Literary Examiner* continued the consecutive numbering of those in the *Indicator*.

<sup>88</sup> Leigh Hunt's *London Journal and the Printing Machine*, Lond., 1834-35, No. 4, vol. 1, p. 28. (Wed., April 23, 1834.)

but it is in the *London Journal* that Hunt most fully sets forth his purpose.

But before turning to the *London Journal*, it is worth while to note Hunt's *Tatler*, which is particularly interesting because it was a daily literary journal and thus a departure from the weekly type of belles-lettres periodicals, standardized by the *Examiner*. The *Tatler, a Daily Journal of Literature and the Stage* ran from September 4, 1830, to March 31, 1832, and was entirely the work of Leigh Hunt except when he was too ill to write for it. It consisted of four folio pages and cost twopence. It resembled the *Indicator* in part, but also had somewhat the character of a newspaper. Hunt displayed his critical ability in the "Play Goer" and the "Reader" departments which kept the public informed of the latest in plays and books. But the content of the paper was not purely literary. Hunt used it as a jousting field in which to meet his political enemies: "I . . . tilted against governments and aristocracies, and kings and princes in general. . . . I also got out of patience with my old antagonists the Tories, to whom I resolved to give as good as they brought; and I did so, and stopped every new assailant. A daily paper, however small, is a weapon that gives an immense advantage; you can make your attacks in it so often."<sup>39</sup> After 493 numbers, the *Tatler* was abandoned. Hunt was physically exhausted by his efforts to write the entire paper, and also to attend the plays he criticised and write the notice of them the same night. "The work, slight as it looked," he says, "nearly killed me."<sup>40</sup>

Although the *Tatler* might in some respects be accounted a failure, it made many friends for Hunt and pointed the way to a fresh literary venture in his *London Journal*, a sixteen-page folio, which in partnership with Charles Knight, Hunt published every Wednesday, beginning April 2, 1834. The purpose was clearly set forth after the title: "*Leigh Hunt's London Journal* to assist the enquiring, animate the struggling, and sympathize with all." The *Journal* was so named because it was intended to be an English counterpart of the *Edinburgh Journal*. Unlike the *Examiner* and the *Tatler* it was entirely divorced from politics. Of the plan

<sup>39</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 375.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374.

of the *London Journal* Hunt in his "Address" in the first number writes: "It is proposed, as the general plan of the Journal . . . that it should consist of One Original Paper or Essay every week, from the pen of the Editor; of matter combining entertainment with information, selected by him in the course of his reading, both old and new; of a weekly Abstract of some popular or otherwise interesting book, the spirit of which will be given *entire*, after the fashion of the excellent abridgements in *Johnstone's Edinburgh Magazine*; and lastly, of a brief current notice of the Existing State of Poetry, Painting, and Music, and a general sprinkle of Notes, Verses, Miscellaneous Paragraphs, and other helps to pleasant and companionable perusal."<sup>41</sup>

This general plan was adhered to; each number as a rule opened with an essay from Hunt's pen, and many of his most charming familiar essays, some of which were reprints from his earlier periodicals, are to be found in its pages. Among those which reveal Hunt as a delightfully companionable essayist, talking of commonplace things in a manner to invest them with his own spontaneous and child-like delight, are: "Breakfast in Summer," "Windows," "Reminiscences of a Journey," "The Cat by the Fire," "Twelfth Night," "A Journey by Coach." Other of his essays, some of which were critical, covered a wide range of subject matter, as "The Present State of the Fine Arts in England," "Conversation of Swift and Pope," "Cleanliness, Air, Exercise and Diet."

*Leigh Hunt's London Journal* has been called an epitome of Hunt himself.<sup>42</sup> He composed all of the original matter in it (not reprinted from elsewhere) and on almost every page his benevolent philosophy shines forth. It is the effort of a mature man who has suffered much and reflected on life, to pass along to his fellow men the fruits of his experience with the idea of giving them "pleasure." The spirit of the familiar essayist pervades the entire periodical. Hunt takes his readers into his confidence, addresses them in the most friendly and intimate manner, and even abolishes the advertisements in order that he may chat more freely with his correspondents.

*Leigh Hunt's London Journal* reveals perhaps even better than

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<sup>41</sup> *Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, No. 1, vol. I, p. 1. (Wed., April 2, 1834.)

<sup>42</sup> Launcelot Cross, *Characteristics of Leigh Hunt*. Lond., 1878.

his *Autobiography* what manner of man Hunt was: his moods, his opinions upon all manner of subjects, extracts from his favorite works, the things he delighted in upon his walks, details of his home surroundings, glimpses of his family life, what he liked to eat, crowd the pages of his journal, and express his personality, and his taste, and above all his desire to share his experiences and pleasures with mankind. That this was a sincere desire no one can question, who reads his declarations to this effect so often expressed in his *Journal*. "We wished," he says, "to create one corner and field of periodical literature, in which men might be sure of hope and cheerfulness, and of the cultivation of peaceful and flowery thoughts, without the accompaniment of anything inconsistent with them; we knew that there was a desire at the bottom of every human heart to retain a faith in such thoughts, and to see others believe in the religion and recommend it; and heartily have anxious as well as happy readers in this green and beautiful England responded to our belief. . . . The *London Journal* is a sort of park for rich and poor, for the reflecting and well-intentioned of all sorts; where every one can be alone, or in company, as he thinks fit, and see, with his mind's eye, a succession of Elysian sights, ancient and modern, and as many familiar objects to boot, or hear nothing but birds and waterfalls, or the comforted beatings of his own heart,—all effected for him by no greater magician than Good Faith and a little reading."<sup>43</sup>

It is pleasant to think that a periodical so redolent of the spirit of the familiar essay also contained the work of Hunt's friends and fellow-essayists Hazlitt and Lamb. Hazlitt is represented by his "Characters of Shakespeare's Plays," which being out of print, Hunt reprinted each week in the later issues of the *London Journal*. Another interesting work of Hazlitt's which Hunt reprinted (Saturday, October 17, 1835, No. 81) was the "First production of Mr. Hazlitt, written when he was thirteen years of age," and addressed to the editor of the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* at the time of the Birmingham riots. The article is a defense of Dr. Priestley's character, and is evidence of Hazlitt's ability to write reasoned and clearly argued prose at an early age.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Leigh Hunt's *London Journal*, No. 23, vol. I, p. 177. (Wed., Sept. 3, 1834.)

<sup>44</sup> Hunt copied this article from the current number of the *Monthly Repository*.

In volume two of the *Journal* appeared "Specimens of the Wit, Humour, and Criticism of Charles Lamb." These extracts culled from Lamb's *Works* continued for four numbers. Hunt's memoir of Charles Lamb which had originally been printed in the *Athenaeum* appeared in the *Journal* for Wednesday, January 21, 1835.

After sixty-two numbers, *Leigh Hunt's London Journal* united (May 27, 1835) with *Knight's Printing Machine*, and henceforth until it ceased publication, in December, 1835, was issued on Saturdays instead of Wednesdays. In explaining its demise, Hunt says: "The note which it had struck was of too aesthetical a nature for cheap readers in those days."<sup>45</sup> Thornton Hunt attributed the *Journal's* failure not only to his father's "speciality (sic) of idea and expression," which limited his circle of readers, but to "the expenditure in time, exertion, and health" in editing such a periodical, an expenditure constantly in excess of the returns.<sup>46</sup> Although the *London Journal* had a comparatively short life,<sup>47</sup> it is of particular importance among periodicals, because Hunt's personality lives in its pages, and also because it contains much material that he later used in some of his most popular books, notably *The Seer* (1840-41); *Imagination and Fancy* (1844); *Wit and Humour* (1846); and *The Town* (1848). The latter work appeared in the supplement to the *Journal*, Part 1, under the title, "The Streets of the Metropolis; their Memories and Great Men."

This brief survey of the periodicals in which the most important of the familiar essays of Lamb, Hunt and Hazlitt appeared, reveals the following facts: First, the familiar essay was the product of the magazines rather than of the reviews; the magazines were in the nature of miscellanies, containing material on a wide range of topics, and including usually literary criticism as well as that of the drama and the fine arts. The variety of subject matter was in direct response to the varied interests of the time and made an appeal to men of many activities and tastes. Second, the literary

<sup>45</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 381.

<sup>46</sup> *Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, vol. 1, p. 267.

<sup>47</sup> An attempt was made by Leigh Hunt to revive the *London Journal* in 1850, but it ran for seventeen numbers only (December 7 to March 29) and then failed for lack of funds. It was likewise a sixteen-page, penny-and-a-half paper, and bore the title "Leigh Hunt's Journal—a miscellany for the cultivation of the memorable, the progressive and the beautiful" (Nos. 1-17, London, 1850-51).



standard of many of the contributors was high and indeed reached a surprising level when the haste with which much of the work was produced is considered. Third, a definite effort was made to be cosmopolitan. Criticism, translations and extracts from foreign literature are a feature of most of the magazines. Fictional tales, oriental in character or origin, appear frequently in Leigh Hunt's periodicals. Fourth, the same essayists were writing critical and familiar essays, and publishing them in the same magazines. The critical essays cover a wide variety of themes, and an even greater range of subject matter is displayed in the familiar essays which, like those of Montaigne, take man for their province. Many of the papers would fit into neither of these classifications, but are character sketches, dream fantasies, reported conversations, "reasoned" discussions of abstract topics, etc. Fifth, Leigh Hunt by opening the pages of the *Examiner* and *Reflector* to Lamb and Hazlitt, and by the many literary periodicals of high standard which he fostered was largely responsible for the nurture of the nineteenth century familiar essay.

The literary quality of the periodicals in the early nineteenth century is of particular importance in the development of the familiar essay. The magazines and reviews were edited for the most part by men of learning and culture, who set and maintained a high standard of literary workmanship. There is abundant evidence that colloquial or careless writing was not tolerated, and that an author not only had to have something to say, but know how to say it. In reading the magazines of the period, one is impressed by the clear, forceful, pointed style of the prose. And not a little of this care for style was due to the exactions of all-powerful editors. The familiar essayists necessarily shared the prevailing concern for style, and the fact that their work had to vie with so much other excellent prose-writing undoubtedly gave them added incentive to put forth their best efforts. Also it was a critical age, and the great outpouring of criticism in the periodicals directed men's attention to *form* as well as *content*. The perfection which the familiar essay attained at this time, seems to have been not only the result of individual genius, but genius directed and fostered by periodicals of high literary standard.

### CHAPTER III

## SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURY INFLUENCES IN THE ESSAYS OF HUNT, LAMB AND HAZLITT

### (1) IN GENERAL

The influence of the seventeenth century is more marked in Lamb than in either Hunt or Hazlitt. Lamb's delight in Robert Burton, Sir Thomas Browne, Jeremy Taylor, and other "worthies" is well known. His humor expresses itself in whimsies and quaint conceits closely akin to those of the seventeenth century writers; and his personal oddities and his mirth and melancholy proclaim his affinity with them. "Out-of-the-way humours and opinions—heads with some diverting twist in them—the oddities of author-ship"<sup>1</sup> he says pleased him most. Such he found in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, over which he would muse "for the thousandth time." His affection for his own copy of this old book in its ancient dress with its quaint frontispiece, made intolerable to him the thought that the work should ever be modernized or issued in new binding. "What hapless stationer," he says, "could dream of Burton ever becoming popular?"<sup>2</sup>

The idea of writing in the manner of Burton was first suggested to Lamb by Coleridge, and resulted in his "forgery" of a manuscript of Burton: "Curious Fragments, extracted from a commonplace book, which belonged to Robert Burton, the famous author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*." The "Fragments" purporting to be taken from Burton's diaries, were published in 1801 with *John Woodvil*. The manner in which Lamb here reveals Burton in different moods, writes in his style, and transmits his flavor, shows how thoroughly he had made the *Anatomy* his own. Burton's influence upon Lamb has already been so thoroughly treated<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Mackery End, in Hertfordshire," *Works*, vol. II, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading," *Works*, vol. II, p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Lake. *A general introduction to Charles Lamb. Together with a special study of his relation to Robert Burton*. Leipzig, 1903. (Doctoral dissertation.)

that further discussion of it here is unnecessary. It should be remarked however that two important characteristics of Lamb's work owe their origin in part at least to Burton's influence: the fantastic element seen so strongly for instance in Lamb's "Anatomy of Tailors," and "A Chapter on Ears," and his use of quotation to give added point and flavor to his essays. The most definite effect of Burton may be traced in Lamb's work previous to the *Essays of Elia*, when he consciously imitated the *Anatomy*. The *Elia* essays frequently give us " 'sweet assurance' that they are descended from the race of Burton," but direct influence is not evident.

Sir Thomas Browne was also a favorite of Lamb's, and one of the two authors chosen from the whole range of English literature whom he would like to have met. The *Urn Burial* was among his own prized volumes, and in "The Two Races of Men" he laments its loss from his shelves, and hints that Coleridge is the culprit. "C. will hardly allege that he knows more about that treatise than I do, who introduced it to him, and was indeed the first (of the moderns) to discover its beauties—but so have I known a foolish lover to praise his mistress in the presence of a rival more qualified to carry her off than himself."<sup>4</sup> The *Religio Medici* (1642) and *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, or *Discourse of Vulgar Errors* (1646) he read thoroughly, and their influence upon his essays may be clearly seen. {He begins "Imperfect Sympathies" by quoting a passage from the *Religio Medici*: "I am of a constitution so general that it consorts and sympathizeth with all things; I have no antipathy, or rather idiosyncrasy in anything. Those national repugnances do not touch me, nor do I behold with prejudice the French, Italian, Spaniard, or Dutch."<sup>5</sup> Lamb then proceeds to disagree with Browne and although he no longer quotes from the *Religio Medici*, his essay is a refutation of some of the ideas expressed there. For example Browne distinguishes the "Essences of Being": "There is but one first cause, and four second causes of all things. Some are without efficient, as God; others without matter, as Angels; some without form as the first matter: but every Essence, created or uncreated, hath its final cause, and some positive end both of its Essence and Operation. This is the

<sup>4</sup> "The Two Races of Men," *Works*, vol. II, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Religio Medici*, pt. 2, sec. 1.

cause I grope after in the works of Nature; on this hangs the Providence of God." <sup>6</sup> Lamb in the first part of his essay doubtless refers to this passage, and gives us something of the flavor of Browne by imitating his Latinized and periodic style: "That the author of the *Religio Medici*, mounted upon the airy stilts of abstraction, conversant about notional and conjectural essences; in whose categories of Being the possible took the upper hand of the actual; should have overlooked the impertinent individualities of such poor concretions as mankind, is not much to be admired." <sup>7</sup>

In his essay "On Burial Societies" Lamb quotes from *Urn Burial* the passage "Man is a noble animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave," <sup>8</sup> and humorously comments upon the "appetite in the species" for things funereal. In this essay however, Lamb makes no effort to write in the manner of Browne. He refers indirectly to *Urn Burial* in "The Old and New Schoolmaster," when he says: "Had he asked of me what song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, I might, with Sir Thomas Browne, have hazarded a 'wide solution.'" Lamb doubtless had in mind the following passage of *Urn Burial*: "What Song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, though puzzling questions, are not beyond all conjecture. What time the person of these Ossuaries entered the famous Nations of the dead, and slept with Princes and Counsellors, might admit a wide solution." <sup>9</sup>

In "My Relations" Lamb quotes from Browne's *Christian Morals* (1716) <sup>10</sup> to give added emphasis to his own opinion.

Lamb's "Popular Fallacies," which originally appeared in the *New Monthly Magazine*, January to September, 1826, were suggested to him by Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, or *Discourse of Vulgar Errors*. Lamb's themes as well as his style and diction are in many instances reminiscent of the earlier writer. "That we Should Rise with the Lark" (No. XIV) for example is not only

<sup>6</sup> *Religio Medici*, pt. 1, sec. 14.

<sup>7</sup> "Imperfect Sympathies," *Works*, vol. II, p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> *Urn Burial*, a Brief Discourse of the Sepulchral Urns lately found in Norfolk, chapter V.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> The book was left unfinished by Sir Thomas Browne's death and was not published until this date.

written upon dreams, a favorite theme of Browne's, but has the flavor of his "discourse." "Some people have no good of their dreams," Lamb says. "We love to chew the cud of a foregone vision: to collect the scattered rays of a brighter phantasm, or act over again, with firmer nerves, the sadder nocturnal tragedies; to drag into day-light a struggling and half-vanishing night-mare; to handle and examine the terrors, or the airy solaces. . . . The abstracted media of dreams seem no ill introduction to that spiritual presence, upon which, in no long time, we expect to be thrown. . . . Therefore, we cherish dreams. . . . We feel attenuated into their meagre essences, and have given the hand of half-way approach to incorporeal being."<sup>11</sup>

Lamb's style invites comparison with that of Sir Thomas Browne in its bold use of metaphor, balance and antithesis of sentence structure, its fanciful conceits and its musical cadences. Its charm and flavor doubtless owe much to his familiarity with the work of Browne and other seventeenth century writers. However, Lamb has so thoroughly stamped his style with his own individuality that it is not to be referred to any one writer.

In "The Genteel Style of Writing" Lamb comments upon another seventeenth century favorite, Sir William Temple, whose essays, in a collection called *Miscellania*, were published in 1780-92. Lamb contrasts Temple's style with that of Lord Shaftesbury, whose *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions and Times* appeared in 1711. "It is an ordinary criticism," says Lamb, "that my Lord Shaftesbury, and Sir William Temple, are models of the genteel style in writing. We should prefer saying of the lordly, and the gentlemanly. Nothing can be more unlike than the inflated finical rhapsodies of Shaftesbury, and the plain natural chit-chat of Temple. . . . The peer seems to have written with his coronet on, and his Earl's mantle before him; the commoner in his elbow chair and undress. What can be more pleasant than the way in which the retired statesman peeps out in the essays, penned by the latter in his delightful retreat at Shene?" After quoting from Temple's "sweet Garden Essay," Lamb continues: "The writings of Temple are, in general, after this easy copy. On one

<sup>11</sup> *Works*, vol. II, pp. 270-71.

occasion, indeed, his wit, which was mostly subordinate to nature and tenderness, has seduced him into a string of felicitous antitheses, which . . . have been a model to Addison and succeeding essayists." This critical opinion of Lamb's has been quoted at length because it so clearly shows his preference for a familiar and simple style in writing. Even though he himself sometimes chose to write in an antithetical and figurative fashion, it was not the style he most admired. That he realized its dangers we know from a letter to Coleridge (August 14, 1800) in which he writes: "To tell the truth, I began to scent that I was getting into that sort of style which Longinus and Dionysius Halicarnassus aptly call 'the affected.' " <sup>12</sup>

Other seventeenth century writers whom Lamb has singled out for comment are Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, whom he calls "the thrice, noble, chaste, and virtuous,—but . . . somewhat fantastical, and original-brain'd, generous Margaret Newcastle." <sup>13</sup> "Such a book . . . as the Life of the Duke of Newcastle, by his Duchess," says Lamb, "no casket is rich enough, no casing sufficiently durable, to honour and keep safe. . . ." <sup>14</sup>

He also held in high regard Jeremy Taylor, whose *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying* (1650-51) he particularly admired. He refers to Taylor in his article "Guy Faux," and wrote at length in appreciation of him to Robert Lloyd (April 6, 1801). "Coleridge," Lamb says, "was the man who first solemnly exhorted me to 'study' the works of Dr. Jeremy Taylor, and I have had reason to bless the hour in which he did it." Lamb preferred the *Holy Dying* to the *Holy Living*. In the former he particularly admired the many similes, and the fancy and humour of the *Story of the Ephesian Matron*. Taylor he considers "has more delicacy and sweetness than any mortal, the 'gentle' Shakespeare hardly excepted—his similes and allusions are taken, as the bees take honey, from all the youngest, greenest, exquisitest parts of nature . . . —his imagination was a spacious Garden, where no vile insects could crawl in; his apprehension a 'Court' where no foul thoughts kept 'leets and

<sup>12</sup> *Life, Letters and Writings of Charles Lamb*, ed. by Percy Fitzgerald, Lond., 1886, vol. I, p. 403.

<sup>13</sup> "Mackery End, in Hertfordshire," *Works*, vol. II, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading," *Ibid.*, p. 174.

holydays.'” Lamb also in this letter calls attention to the fact that Taylor wrote for different classes of people; that in his devotional works he contrives his conceits, allusions and analogies to appeal to the fancy of women and young people, whereas his *Liberty of Prophecy* is “fitted to great Clerks and learned Fathers, with no more of Fancy than is subordinate and ornamental.”<sup>15</sup>

In his *Specimens from the Writings of Fuller, the Church Historian*, which appeared in the *Reflector* (No. 4) 1812,<sup>16</sup> Lamb has singled out for quotation those passages which best illustrate Fuller’s figurative language and the use of conceits, which Lamb notes are “oftentimes deeply steeped in human feeling and passion.”

In general, it may be said that Lamb was particularly interested in those seventeenth century writers, whose work exhibited familiar elements, was rich in fancy and well chosen conceits, and whose style was individual and exhibited odd and fantastic turns of thought.

Hunt and Hazlitt were less influenced by the seventeenth century than was Lamb, yet their interest in these writers is worthy of note. It appears partly in critical comment, some of it unfavorable, and partly in their use of quotations and their choice of themes. In his *Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth*, Hazlitt criticizes Browne at length and clothes his criticism in a wealth of figurative language which Browne himself might have envied: “His is the sublime of indifference; a passion for the abstruse and imaginary. He turns the world round for his amusement, as if it was a globe of paste-board. He looks down on sublunary affairs as if he had taken his station in one of the planets. The Antipodes are next-door neighbours to him, and Dooms-day is not far off. With a thought he embraces both the poles; the march of his pen is over the great divisions of geography and chronology. . . . The great Platonic year revolves in one of his periods. Nature is too little for the grasp of his style. He scoops an antithesis out of fabulous antiquity, and rakes up an epithet from the sweepings of Chaos. . . . He stands on the edge of the world of sense and reason, and gains a vertigo by looking down at impossibilities and

<sup>15</sup> *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds*, ed. by E. V. Lucas, Phila., 1898, p. 147 f.

<sup>16</sup> *Works*, vol. I, p. 112 f.

chimeras.”<sup>17</sup> Hazlitt’s criticism shows close study of Browne as a writer; and his impatience with Browne’s abstractions. He sums up Browne’s characteristics with the cogent comment that “he only existed at the circumference of his nature.” Of his style Hazlitt says that he decks out his “contradictions and non-entities” “in the pride and pedantry of words as if they were the attire of his proper person: the categories hang about his neck like the gold chain of knighthood, and he ‘walks gowned’ in the intricate folds and swelling drapery of dark sayings and impenetrable riddles!”<sup>18</sup> The “one gorgeous passage” quoted by Hazlitt as illustrative of Browne’s writing begins “What song the Syrens sang.” Lamb’s reference to the same passage in one of his essays has already been referred to.

Hazlitt contrasts Jeremy Taylor with Sir Thomas Browne, and it is plain that he reserves his enthusiasm for Taylor. He calls his *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying* “a divine pastoral.” “His style,” he says, “is prismatic. It unfolds the colours of the rainbow; it floats like the bubble through the air; it is like innumerable dew-drops that glitter on the face of the morning and tremble as they glitter.”<sup>19</sup> Hazlitt also observes that Taylor’s “writings are more like fine poetry than any other prose whatever; they are a choral song in praise of virtue, a hymn to the Spirit of the Universe.”<sup>20</sup> He sums up the difference between Browne and Taylor: “The one shews that things are nothing out of themselves, or in relation to the whole: the one, what they are in themselves, and in relation to us.”<sup>21</sup>

Hazlitt concludes his essay “On the Prose-Style of Poets” by remarking “that some of the old English prose-writers (who were not poets) are the best, and, at the same time, the most *poetical* in the favourable sense. Among these we may reckon some of the old divines, and Jeremy Taylor at the head of them. There is a flush like the dawn over his writings; the sweetness of the rose, the freshness of the morning-dew. There is a softness in his style,

<sup>17</sup> *Works*, vol. V, pp. 333-34.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

<sup>19</sup> “Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth,” *Ibid.*, pp. 341-42.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.



proceeding from the tenderness of his heart; but his head is firm, and his hand is free. His materials are as finely wrought up as they are original and attractive in themselves." <sup>22</sup> Hazlitt's critical comments on Browne and Taylor show his preference for a prose style which is individual, poetic, colorful, and not over-decorated.

Although Hazlitt had appreciation and praise for the seventeenth century essayists, he did not care to model his style after them. "A sprinkling of archaisms is not amiss;" he believes, "but a tissue of obsolete expressions is more fit *for keep than wear*. I do not say I would not use any phrase that had been brought into fashion before the middle or the end of the last century; but I should be shy of using any that had not been employed by any approved author during the whole of that time. Words, like clothes, get old-fashioned, or mean and ridiculous, when they have been for some time laid aside." <sup>23</sup> Lamb is the only imitator of 'old English' style, Hazlitt says, that he can read with pleasure, and he attributes this to the fact that Lamb "is so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of his authors, that the idea of imitation is almost done away with. There is an inward unction, a marrowy vein both in the thought and feeling, an intuition, deep and lively, of his subject, that carries off any quaintness or awkwardness arising from an antiquated style and dress." <sup>24</sup>

Although no direct influence of the seventeenth century essayists is to be found in Hazlitt's work, he follows their example in the use of metaphor, simile and fanciful figures of speech, and in the decoration of his essays with quotations. He also quotes occasionally from them, and writes upon similar themes. In his essay "On the Love of Life," for example, he quotes from *Holy Dying*, in support of his statement that 'the love of life is, in general, the effect not of our enjoyments, but of our passions.' <sup>25</sup>

Hunt was not influenced in style by the seventeenth century essayists, but his knowledge of their work is evident from his references to it in his essays. In "Poetical Anomalies of Shape," he

<sup>22</sup> *Works*, vol. VII, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> "On Familiar Style," *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 245.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 1.

says: "When Sir Thomas Browne, in the infinite range of his metaphysical optics, turned his glass, as he no doubt often did towards the inhabitants of other worlds, the stories of angels and Centaurs would help his imaginative good-nature to a more willing conception of creatures in other planets unlike those on earth; to other 'lords of creation'; and other, and perhaps nobler humanities."<sup>26</sup> He again refers to Browne in his essay, "Bees, Butterflies, etc.": "Sir Thomas Browne would not have thought it beneath him to ask what all those innumerable little gentry (we mean the insects) are about, between our breakfast and dinner; how the time passes in the solitudes of America, or the depths of the Persian Gulf; or what they are doing even, towards three in the afternoon, in the planet Mercury."<sup>27</sup> In "Of Dreams," Hunt quotes from Browne (*Inner Temple Mask*) and calls him "Spenser's follower."<sup>28</sup> Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* furnishes a quotation for Hunt's "Treatise on Devils"; and frequent references to melancholy in Hunt's essays reflect his interest in the subject.

Such themes as death, melancholy, witchcraft, devils, angels, dreams were favorites with the seventeenth century essayists, and the familiar essayists likewise have made interesting use of these subjects. Hazlitt writes on "The Fear of Death,"<sup>29</sup> and Hunt devotes three essays to the subject: "On Death and Burial";<sup>30</sup> "Life after Death—Belief in Spirits"<sup>31</sup> and "Deaths of Little Children."<sup>32</sup> Lamb gives a new turn to the same theme in "On Burial Societies."<sup>33</sup> Hunt treats Burton's favorite topic in his "Advice to the Melancholy."<sup>34</sup> Lamb's "On the Melancholy of Tailors,"<sup>35</sup> and his "Curious Fragments"<sup>36</sup> have previously been

<sup>26</sup> *Indicator; A Miscellany for the Fields and the Fireside*. By Leigh Hunt, N. Y., 1845, pt. 1, p. 187-88.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 2, p. 153.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 2, p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> *Works*, vol. VI, p. 321 f.

<sup>30</sup> Leigh Hunt. *The Seer, or Commonplaces Refreshed*. Bost., 1864, vol. II, p. 148 f.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140 f.

<sup>32</sup> *Indicator*, pt. I, p. 182 f.

<sup>33</sup> *Works*, vol. I, p. 92.

<sup>34</sup> *Indicator*, pt. I, p. 23 f.

<sup>35</sup> *Works*, vol. I, p. 172 f.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31 f.

mentioned. His "Witches and Other Night-Fears"<sup>37</sup> carries on the traditional theme, and a closely allied subject forms the theme of Hunt's essay "A Treatise on Devils."<sup>38</sup> Hunt and Lamb write on the heavenly hierarchy in "A Few Words on Angels";<sup>39</sup> and "The Child Angel; a Dream,"<sup>40</sup> and dreams are the subject of essays by Hunt<sup>41</sup> and Hazlitt.<sup>42</sup>

When we turn to the eighteenth century we find the periodical essay exercising a more general influence upon Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt than does the work of seventeenth century writers. As has already been noted, the *Tatler* and *Spectator* in particular, affected the nineteenth century familiar essay. Long after they ceased publication, the *Tatler* and *Spectator* were prized volumes in many households. That they provided models for school compositions we know from Leigh Hunt, who has left an amusing picture of his early efforts, when at Christ's Hospital, to abridge papers from the *Spectator*. One of the favorite essays with the boys, because it was considered one of the easiest, began: "I have always preferred cheerfulness to mirth." "I had heard this paper so often," Hunt says, "and was so tired with it, that it gave me a great inclination to prefer mirth to cheerfulness."<sup>43</sup> Thus Hunt early made the acquaintance of the *Spectator* essays, and must have absorbed much of their style, even though their worldly wisdom seemed to him then "very difficult and perplexing." Years later he received as a gift, a copy of the original number of Steele's *Tatler*, and in a letter of thanks expresses his delight: "I have been carrying it about the house with me, like a child who has had a picture-book given it; and have put it among some favourite books on a shelf, just before the table at which I write, that it may help to give me pleasant thoughts. I persuade myself that Steele may have had this identical copy in his hand, perhaps Pope, perhaps my Lady Suffolk."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Works*, vol. II, p. 65 f.

<sup>38</sup> Leigh Hunt. *Wishing-Cap Papers*, Bost., 1888. p. 160 f.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184 f.

<sup>40</sup> *Works*, vol. II, p. 244 f.

<sup>41</sup> "Of Dreams," *Indicator*, pt. II, p. 93 f.

<sup>42</sup> "On Dreams," *Works*, vol. VII, p. 17 f.

<sup>43</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 71.

<sup>44</sup> To J. F., June 20, 1831, *Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, vol. 1, p. 263.

Hunt shows his familiarity with the material in the *Spectator* and *Tatler* by references to it scattered through his essays, and on more than one occasion he uses the same poetical quotations as Steele had used in the *Tatler*. In his collection *A Book for a Corner* he includes stories which had been published in the *Tatler*. In his essay, "A Word Upon Indexes" he recalls the indexes to the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*, and says let anyone read them and "then call an index a dry thing if he can. . . . But as grapes, ready to burst with wine, issue out of most stony places, like jolly fellows bringing Burgundy out of a cellar; so an index, like the *Tatler's*, often gives us a taste of the quintessence of his humour." <sup>45</sup> Hunt's interest in the periodical essayists is still further shown by his naming one of his own papers *The Tatler*, and also by the fact that the Round Table in the *Examiner* as originally planned, was to have been patterned after the *Tatler* and *Spectator*.

Hazlitt also, when a boy, made the acquaintance of the *Tatler*. In *English Comic Writers* he pays homage to Steele: "I owed this acknowledgement to a writer who has so often put me in good humour with myself, and everything about me, when few things else could, and when the tomes of casuistry and ecclesiastical history, with which the little duodecimo volumes of the *Tatler* were overwhelmed and surrounded, in the only library to which I had access when a boy, had tried their tranquillising effects upon me in vain." <sup>46</sup> His boyhood liking was confirmed by his mature judgment; he always preferred the *Tatler* to the *Spectator* and thought Steele a less artificial and more original writer than Addison. His Round Table paper No. 3 is devoted to the *Tatler*. "Of all our periodical Essayists, he says, "the *Tatler* (sic) . . . has always appeared to me the most amusing and agreeable." <sup>47</sup> In the same essay Hazlitt expresses his admiration for certain characteristics of Steele's writing, viz: the power of keen observation and the ability to record truthfully, which he refers to as "the freshness and stamp of nature"; "the indications of character and strokes of humour"; "the reflections" which "arise from the occasion . . . more like the remarks which occur in sensible conversa-

<sup>45</sup> *Indicator*, pt. II, pp. 88-89.

<sup>46</sup> "On the Periodical Essayists," *Works*, vol. VIII, p. 99.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

tion, and less like a lecture"; and the descriptions which "resemble loose sketches or fragments of a comedy."<sup>48</sup> It is Steele's understanding of the fundamental qualities of human nature that particularly attracts Hazlitt: "Systems and opinions change but nature is always true." Therefore he prefers the *Tatler* with its "first sprightly runnings" to the "moral dissertations and critical reasonings" of the *Spectator*. It is to be noted that the qualities which Hazlitt most appreciated in the *Tatler* essays are those which carried over into the familiar essay: truth of observation, humor, the flavor of good conversation, the ability to describe with dramatic terseness so that a scene is flashed upon the mind or a character is "indicated."

Hazlitt however is not unappreciative of Addison. He finds some of his moral essays "exquisitely beautiful and quite happy" — "the perfection of elegant sermonizing."<sup>49</sup> "I am far from wishing to depreciate Addison's talents," he says, "but I am anxious to do justice to Steele, who was, I think, upon the whole, a less artificial and more original writer."<sup>50</sup>

Leigh Hunt also was attracted by Addison's moral essays: "But what grace, ease, wit, and sense in his writings; and how much good they did to private life, and what gratitude we owe him to this hour in consequence! No man can be sure, that a good part of the decency and amenity of intercourse which he enjoys in his own house at this moment, is not owing to the lessons of Addison."<sup>51</sup> As we shall try to show later, Hunt was probably influenced in his philosophy of life by Addison.

Lamb was likewise familiar with the essays of Addison and Steele. His own library contained volumes of the *Spectator* and the *Guardian*. Some of his early contributions to the *Reflector* (1810-12), "Edax on Appetite," "On Hissing at the Theatre," "On Burial Societies," clearly show the influence of the *Spectator*. He preferred however the graceful rambling of Cowley's essays to

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 97.

<sup>49</sup> "On the Periodical Essayists," *Works*, vol. VIII, p. 99.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 97.

<sup>51</sup> "Second Week in May," *Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, No. 6, p. 42. (Wednesday, May 7, 1834.)

"the courtly elegance and ease of Addison; abstracting . . . the latter's exquisite humour." <sup>52</sup>

Lamb's essays in the *Reflector* are doubly interesting in that they show the influence of the periodical essay, and mark a transition stage in the familiar essay when it had not entirely freed itself from eighteenth century models. We have only to compare his *Reflector* papers with his Elia essays to realize the difference in treatment. They lack the play of fancy, the self-revelation, and the originality which distinguish the writings of Elia. Their affinity to the *Spectator* essays is to be seen in their style, and in the manner in which they make us of the letter and the character. "Edax on Appetite" is illustrative of the type. It begins: "Mr. Reflector,—I am going to lay before you a case of the most iniquitous persecution that ever poor devil suffered" and concludes: "Some of my acquaintance, who may read my case in your pages under a borrowed name, may be induced to give it a more humane consideration than I could ever yet obtain from them under my own. Make them, if possible, to *reflect*, that an original peculiarity of constitution is no crime; that not that which goes into the mouth desecrates a man, but that which comes out of it,—such as sarcasm, bitter jests, mocks and taunts, and ill-natured observations; and let them consider, if there be such things (which we have all heard of) as Pious Treachery, Innocent Adultery, &c. whether there may not be also such a thing as Innocent Gluttony.

I shall only subscribe myself,  
Your afflicted servant, Edax." <sup>53</sup>

Addison himself might be speaking, but the sly humor is Lamb's own. The manner in which Lamb reproduces the style and tone of the "moral" essays of the *Spectator* is proof that he absorbed the style of what he read. He shows the same facility in giving the very flavor and essence of Burton, and yet what a distance in style separates the *Anatomy of Melancholy* from the *Spectator*.

Lamb's use of the "character" in his *Reflector* papers may have been suggested by the "characters" in the *Taller*. The many

<sup>52</sup> *Life, Letters and Writings of Charles Lamb*, ed. by Percy Fitzgerald, vol. 1, p. 363.

<sup>53</sup> *Works*, vol. I, pp. 118, 124.

character-sketches in the Elia essays also invite comparison with those of the Sir Roger de Coverley papers in the *Spectator*. In two of the *Reflector* papers: "On the Danger of Confounding Moral with Personal Deformity," and "On Burial Societies," Lamb uses the device of a handbill, about whose contents he weaves his essay. The handbills are in the nature of advertisements, and again, Lamb may have derived this idea for his papers from the humorous "Advertisements" of the *Spectator*. Likewise Lamb's club for authors who have been fairly damned may have been suggested by the club device of the periodical essayists.

That Lamb for his essay form should have gone back to Steele and Addison is the more interesting when we recall that he had already written more in the vein of the familiar essayist in his "Londoner," which he had contributed to the *Morning Post* in 1802. That he was not following the example of Leigh Hunt is evident from Hunt's *Reflector* essay, "A Day by the Fire," which displays the characteristics of the familiar essay at its best. Likenesses to the *Spectator* may be noted in Hunt's essay in only minor respects, notably in his use of quotation to adorn and give point to his remarks, and in the easy chair drawn up to the fire. But here we find none of the well known "devices" set up between author and reader. Hunt speaks directly in his own person. "I must request the reader to go with me through a day's enjoyments by the fireside. It is part of my business as a Reflector, to look about for helps to reflection; and, for this reason, among many others, I indulge myself in keeping a good fire from morning till night. I have also a reflective turn for an easy chair, and a very thinking attachment to comfort in general."<sup>54</sup>

In the literary department of the *Examiner* which Hunt set up in 1815 under the title of the "Round Table," we see again the influence of the periodical essayists. Hunt proposed to publish a series of papers in the manner of the *Spectator* and *Tatler*, which were to be contributed by various persons on a variety of subjects, Hunt himself being responsible for the dramatic criticism. The "club" idea was retained, but with the difference that its members would assume no fictitious characters, but talk undisguisedly, as

<sup>54</sup> *Reflector*, No. 4.

the natural beings they were. Politics somewhat disrupted the plan, and the essays did not adhere as closely to their Queen Anne models as was to have been expected. However, in the range of their interests, "Manners, Morals and Taste," they followed their models. The first essay contributed by Hazlitt to the "Round Table," "On the Love of Life," in its gravity of tone and in its conclusion that the strength of our attachment to life "is a very fallacious test of its happiness" has all the moral earnestness of Addison, but the style is Hazlitt's. Addison is among the authors whom Hazlitt draws upon for quotations to adorn his essay. The subjects considered in the "Round Table," to which attention has already been called, reflect the interests of the nineteenth century no less than the *Tatler* and *Spectator* had mirrored those of the eighteenth. In its general plan if not in its style the "Round Table" partook of the nature of the essay periodical.

One of the most delightful of Hunt's essays, "Coffee Houses and Smoking" takes us into the haunts of the Queen Anne essayists and their readers. Hunt imagines himself back in the eighteenth century, sitting in one of the coffee houses talking to Will Honeycomb. He arrives there by way of Gliddon's snuff and tobacco shop in King Street: "Ay, here, said I, is wherewithal to fill the boxes of the Steeles and Congreves, and the pipes of the Aldriches and Sir Roger de Coverleys. But where is the room in which we can fancy them? Where is the coffee house to match? Where the union of a certain domestic comfort with publicity,—journals of literature as well as news,—a fire visible to all,—cups without inebriety,—smoking without vulgarity?"<sup>55</sup>

Like the periodical essayists, Hunt aimed to improve society through his journals. In his early career as a journalist, he sought the reform of politics and the evils arising from public life; in his later years he turned to the "Christianizing of public manners," but that he meant this in no narrow sense the following passage from his *London Journal* shows: "It is our ambition to be one of the sowers of a good seed in places where it is not common but would be most profitable, to be one of those who should try to render a sort of public loving-kindness, a grace of common-life, a conventional, and for that very reason, in the higher sense of the

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<sup>55</sup> *Wishing-Cap Papers*, p. 252.



word, a social and universal elegance. . . . We would fain do something, however small and light, towards Christianizing public manners." <sup>56</sup> Earlier in the same paper Hunt speaks of "love enshrined as the only final teacher of all knowledge and advancement." "No new religion, truly," he remarks, but "too sacred and wonderful to have justice done it in these small chapels built for conventional persuasion." <sup>57</sup>

Hunt, then, if we interpret him aright, would use his paper as a pulpit, and would preach to mankind the fundamental doctrine of Christianity: love. Through the dissemination of loving-kindness he would teach men a better way of life, and would enable them to find pleasure in simple things. His audience was wide and he aimed at fundamentals. His purpose like that of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* was a moral one but the difference is one in outlook of the two centuries.

In the following number of his *Journal* Hunt set forth his "credo" of cheerfulness, which resembles that of Addison. In two papers of the *Spectator* (Nos. 381, 387) Addison treats of cheerfulness, first as a moral habit of mind, and second in its natural state. In the first paper Addison remarks: "A cheerful mind is not only disposed to be affable and obliging, but raises the same good-humour in those who come within its influence. A man finds himself pleased, he does not know why, with the cheerfulness of his companion. It is like a sudden sunshine that awakes a secret delight in the mind, without her attending to it. The heart rejoices of its own accord, and naturally flows out into friendship and benevolence towards the person who has so kindly an effect upon it." <sup>58</sup>

Hunt in his *Journal* <sup>59</sup> writes: "Our object was to put more sunshine into the feelings of our countrymen, more good will and good humour, a greater *habit* of being pleased with one another and with everything, and therefore a greater power of dispensing with uneasy sources of satisfaction. We wished to create one

<sup>56</sup> *Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, No. 22, vol. I, p. 176 (Wed., Aug. 27, 1834).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Spectator*, No. 381.

<sup>59</sup> No. 23, vol. I, p. 177 (Wed., Sept. 3, 1834).

corner and field of periodical literature, in which men might be sure of hope and cheerfulness, and of the cultivation of peaceful and flowery thoughts, without the accompaniment of anything inconsistent with them."

In Addison's second essay on cheerfulness,<sup>60</sup> there is this passage: "Cheerfulness bears the same friendly regard to the mind as to the body. It vanishes all anxious care and discontent, soothes (sic) and composes the passions, and keeps the soul in a perpetual calm. But having already touched on this last consideration, I shall here take notice, that *the world in which we are placed is filled with innumerable objects that are proper to raise and keep alive this happy temper of mind.*"<sup>61</sup>

It is interesting to compare the italicized portion of the passage above, with the following one from Hunt: "If we end in doing nothing but extending a faith in capabilities of any sort, and showing some thousands of our fellow-creatures *that sources of amusement and instruction await but a touch in the objects around them*, to start up like magic, and enrich the meanest hut, perhaps the most satiated ennui, we shall have done something not unworthy to receive the countenance of their unanimity."<sup>62</sup>

Not only did Hunt in his *Journals* advocate cheerfulness and contentment with the simple things of life, but he practiced what he preached. His faith in the essential goodness of man, his own cheerfulness in spite of trials and discouragements, his almost childish delight in ordinary things are expressed continually in his later writing. It is this benevolent attitude carried to the extreme which accounts for much of his sentimentality.

In his introduction to the *Indicator* and *Companion* written in 1833, when they were published in book form, Hunt says: "Both the works were written with the same view of inculcating a love of nature and imagination, and of furnishing a sample of the enjoyment which they afford; and he [the author] cannot give a better proof of that enjoyment, as far as he was capable of it, than by stating, that both were written during times of great trouble with

<sup>60</sup> *Spectator*, No. 387.

<sup>61</sup> Italics by the present writer.

<sup>62</sup> *Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, No. 22, vol. I, p. 176 (Wed., Aug. 27, 1834). Italics by the present writer.

him, and both helped him to see much of that fair play between his own anxieties and his natural cheerfulness, of which an indestructible belief in the good and the beautiful has rendered him perhaps not undeserving."<sup>63</sup>

This "philosophy" of cheerfulness also expresses itself in Hunt's attitude toward nature. In all the myriad manifestations of nature, particularly in the seasons, and in the beauty of field and wood and growing things, Hunt would find a solace for man from the cares of the world, a fount of that cheerfulness which in man is but an expression of his faith in a higher Being. Addison gives succinct expression to this idea: "The creation is a perpetual feast to the mind of a good man; every thing he sees cheers and delights him. Providence has imprinted so many smiles on nature, that it is impossible for a mind which is not sunk in more gross and sensual delights, to take a survey of them without several secret sensations of pleasure."<sup>64</sup>

This of course is no new thought; it was expressed by the Psalmist David, but since Hunt seems to have absorbed other ideas of Addison's with regard to "cheerfulness," there is reason to believe that the idea of nature as a source of man's cheer might have received emphasis from the same source. But it should be noted that however much Hunt may have felt the moral import of this truth, his treatment of it is more frequently romantic than didactic; and in his descriptions of nature there is much of the exuberance which marked the Romantic Revival.

## (2) THE "CHARACTER" AND THE CHARACTER-SKETCH

One of the seventeenth and eighteenth century influences which may be traced in the essays of Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt is that of the character-writers. The many character sketches which adorn the pages of these essayists, owe their origin not to the full-length character delineations of the novel, but to those briefer, more concise presentations of personal or type traits which are called "characters." Character-writing underwent certain developments

<sup>63</sup> Introduction: *The Indicator, and the Companion; A Miscellany for the Fields and the Fire-side*. By Leigh Hunt. In Two Parts. Part I. Lond., 1840.

<sup>64</sup> *Spectator*, No. 393.

in the seventeenth century which made possible the many individualized descriptions of type characteristic of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* and other eighteenth century periodicals, and these influenced the character-sketches of the early nineteenth century essayists.

The "character" has been defined as "a short account, usually in prose, of the properties, qualities, or peculiarities which serve to individualize a type."<sup>65</sup> The character-writer is concerned with features common to the type he is describing, rather than with the peculiar qualities which individualize the person or thing. The "character" has been likened to a kind of prose sonnet which is limited as to range of subject, since there are few individual types of character and these change but little from century to century. A distinguishing mark of the "character" is its form; short balanced sentences are usually employed, which lend it conciseness and emphasize its brevity. The opening sentence is frequently a definition and is followed by a detailing of the characteristic traits of the type described. The ending may be epigrammatic, or in the form of a conceit. The motive is usually didactic or satirical.

The vogue of character-writing in England in the seventeenth century may be traced to a French translation of the *Ethical Characters* of Theophrastus, made by Casaubon, a French scholar in 1592. The early seventeenth century character-writers took Theophrastus for their model and their work exhibits many of his outstanding qualities, such as classic economy of form, conciseness and precision of expression. Character-writing, it is true, had been practiced in England before the seventeenth century, but it had appeared in some other form, such as poetry and the drama, and it was not until Hall, Overbury and Earle produced their "characters," that the "character" was isolated from other literary genres. While the work of the English character-writers of the seventeenth century shows the influence of Theophrastus, it also exhibits individual characteristics.

For example, Joseph Hall, whose *Characters of Virtues and Vices* appeared in 1608, while closely following the Greek model in describing the traits proper to a character, added his own com-

<sup>65</sup> Edward Chauncey Baldwin. "The Relation of the Seventeenth Century Character to the Periodical Essay." *P.M.L.A.*, No. XIX, 1904, p. 75.

ments in euphuistic style, thus introducing into English character-writing the fashion for conceits and epigrammatic expressions. He made some attempt to analyse the motives which actuated his characters, but he failed to lend life to his sketches. He further developed the "character" by describing those who are types not only by virtue of particular moral qualities, but because of certain attributes peculiar to their position or office. His "Character of a Good Magistrate" furnished the pattern for a succession of character descriptions of this type, which continued into the nineteenth century and is well illustrated by Lamb's "Character of an Undertaker."

Sir Thomas Overbury also advanced the art of character-writing through his collection of *Characters*, published in 1614, entitled: *A Wife . . . Whereunto are added many witty Characters and conceited Newes, written by himself and other learned Gentlemen his friends*. His use of conceits and antithesis carried on the tradition of euphuistic character-writing, but he proved himself an originator in his sketches describing the character of places, and in his description of national types, such as the "Braggadocio Welshman," which may be considered the prototype of Lamb's "true Caledonian" in his essay, "Imperfect Sympathies," and of Hazlitt's delineation of national traits in his paper "On the Scotch Character." Mr. Baldwin<sup>66</sup> has called attention to the fact that Overbury also anticipated the use of the "character" as a form of political satire, for instance in his pictures of "A Jesuit," "A Puritan," and "A Precisian." Thus he pointed the way for the many campaign tracts written in the form of "characters," and for such final developments of the form as Hazlitt's "Character of Mr. Pitt." Even more important was Overbury's picturing of contemporary manners through the "character," and his portrayal of external peculiarities, which made it possible to visualize the type described. His "Character of a Fine Gentleman" undoubtedly furnished a model to the periodical essayists, when they pointed their morals with character sketches of figures in the world of London fashion, and gave their sketches a humorous turn by describing outward peculiarities.

<sup>66</sup> Op. cit., p. 107.

The "character" thus developed from a number of moral attributes defining a type toward a more concrete picture, which suggested, if it did not delineate, an individual. Still further development of the form is to be found in John Earle's *Microcosmography, or Piece of the World discovered in Essays and Characters* (1628). His analysis of character, prompted by a desire to account for the traits exhibited by the type, marks another step in character portrayal, which was advancing steadily toward the portrait of the individual who would at the same time be representative of the type. Such character drawing led to the creation of Sir Roger de Coverley, who while individualized also represents a distinct type, and is the forerunner of portrait-types in the novel as well as the essay.

The "character" became divorced from its stereotyped form in the work of Thomas Fuller, whose *Holy and Profane States* appeared in 1642. For the usual balanced, concise, antithetical style is substituted a highly individual style. Anecdotes, witticisms and doggerel verses are introduced. By putting himself into his writing Fuller gave a more subjective treatment to his character-sketches, and lent them a charm and human quality which those of his predecessors had lacked. He expands and embellishes his "characters" by means of concrete illustrations drawn from the fund of stories which he had at his command. "His way of telling a story," says Lamb, "for its eager liveliness, and the perpetual running commentary of the narrator happily blended with the narration, is perhaps unequalled."<sup>67</sup> Fuller's wit and natural aptitude for conceits also contributed to his success as a character-writer. Coleridge says that his wit "in quantity, quality and perpetuity, surpassed that of the wittiest in a witty age." It is perhaps significant that Lamb's "character," "The Good Clerk," should have appeared in the same number of the *Reflector* with his "Specimens" from Fuller.

Another seventeenth century character-writer who deserves mention for having exerted an influence upon the familiar essay is Nicholas Breton, whose *Fantasticks* (1626) is chiefly interesting for its characterization of the seasons, which displays a keen

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<sup>67</sup> "Specimens from the Writings of Fuller, the Church Historian," *Works*, v. I, p. 112.

observation of nature and a poetic vein new to the "character." Breton is of particular importance for his influence upon Leigh Hunt. The affinity between Hunt's essay "A Now" descriptive of "a hot day" and Breton's description of June is a marked one. Breton writes: "It is now June, and the Hay-makers are mustered to make an army for the field where not alwayes in order, they march under the Bagge, and the Bottle, when betwixt the Forke and the Rake, there is seene great force of armes. Now doth the broad Oke comfort the weary Laborer, while under his shady Boughes he sits singing to his bread and cheese: the Hay-cocke is the Poore mans Lodging, and the fresh River is his gracious Neighbour."<sup>68</sup> Hunt says: "Now the mower begins to make his sweeping cuts more slowly, and resorts oftener to the beer. Now the carter sleeps a-top of his load of hay, or plods with double slouch of shoulder, looking out with eyes winking under his shading hat, and with a hitch upward of one side of his mouth. . . . Now laborers look well resting in their white shirts at the doors of rural ale-houses. Now an elm is fine there, with a seat under it. . . ."<sup>69</sup>

The English "character" by the beginning of the eighteenth century had achieved variety in both theme and treatment. The objective setting forth of the qualities representative of a type of person, the pattern for which had been established by Theophrastus, was succeeded by the application of the "character" to various themes such as modes of life, occupations, the animal and vegetable kingdom, the elements, the seasons, and places. As the subject matter for "characters" became still further exhausted, the form was employed for a great variety of miscellaneous themes. In treatment the "character" tended to become less objective and euphuistic in style. A further development was in the allying of the "character" with the essay, as in *The Good Schoolmaster*, in which Fuller took for the topic sentence of each paragraph some attribute of character descriptive of a school-master, and developed the paragraphs in essay style.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Nicholas Breton, "June," *Fantasticks*, p. 9. In his *Works in Verse and Prose*, vol. 2, Edinburgh, 1879.

<sup>69</sup> *Indicator*, pt. 2, p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> The close union between the two forms is also recognized by Nicholas Breton in the Dedication of his *Characters upon Essays Morali and Divine* (1615).

In tracing the effect of the seventeenth century character-writers upon later essayists, no account can afford to omit Jean de La Bruyère, the most widely known of French character-writers, who indirectly represents English influence. Character-writing in France owed its inspiration largely to England, and especially to Bishop Hall's *Characters* published in a French translation in 1619. La Bruyère published in 1688 his *Les Caractères de Theophraste traduits du grec; avec les Caractères, et les Moeurs de ce Siècle*. He successfully accomplished what the English writers had worked toward, but had not achieved, that is the drawing of individual character in such a manner that the individual became representative of a class. His English predecessors had created types which by means of much witty ingenuity, they endowed with attributes which enabled an individual to recognize himself in the type, but La Bruyère made his readers believe in the individuality of the characters he typified. He effected this by means of minute personal details introduced into his description of a type. These details were apparently drawn from his circle of acquaintances, and with such verisimilitude as to warrant the publication of various "keys" to the identification of the originals. A further contribution made by La Bruyère was his union of the familiar essay with the "character." Hitherto the "character" had been allied with the Baconian type of essay. La Bruyère also lent interest to his "characters" by the addition of epigrammatic reflections which had the flavor of the maxims and *pensées* of La Rochefaucauld and Pascal. The effect of La Bruyère in England is to be particularly noted in the periodical essayists. Steele under guise of Isaac Bickerstaff freely acknowledges his debt to La Bruyère in the *Tatler* (No. 9): "I shall take all the privileges I may as an Englishman, and will lay hold of the late act of naturalization to introduce what I shall think fit from France. The use of that law may, I hope, be extended to people the polite world with new characters, as well as the kingdom itself with new subjects. Therefore an author of that nation, called La Bruyere, I shall make bold with on such occasions."

The "character," freed of euphuism, and sympathetically and humorously drawn, had reached a stage of development early in



the eighteenth century which made it a ready medium for the periodical essayists. In the *Tatler* and *Spectator* the character-sketch proved an admirable means of lending concreteness to the general observations of the essayist, of emphasizing the moral he wished to bring home, and of providing the wit and humor necessary to hold the reader's attention. About one-sixth of the essays in the *Tatler* are "character" papers, varied in content, as for example: "Character of Sir Timothy Tittle" (No. 165), "Characters of a Prude and Coquette" (No. 126), "Characters of the Members of the Club at the Trumpet" (No. 132), "Characters of an Affectionate Couple" (No. 150), "Characters of Impudence and Absurdity" (No. 168), "Characters in a Stage-Coach" (No. 192). There is no attempt made in these sketches to keep the traditional form of the "character": the short balanced sentence, the opening definition of type, the epigrammatic ending. On the contrary the utmost freedom of form is displayed, so that these sketches should be considered as representing a transitional stage when the "character" had been freed from the early limitations displayed by the imitators of Theophrastus, but had not yet attained the detailed analysis of the character-sketch found later in the novel. Take for example the "Character of an Upholsterer" (*Tatler*, No. 155) whose original was said to have been Mr. Arne, an upholsterer in Covent Garden. The sketch is a clever take-off of a man who is a "newsmonger," so interested in reading and detailing the daily news that he neglects his family and business. Mr. Bickerstaff represents himself as carrying on a conversation with this "very grave person" who "looked extremely thin in a dearth of news, and never enjoyed himself in a westerly wind." The man's pet foible is revealed through what he says. His outward appearance is minutely described: "I saw," says Mr. Bickerstaff, "he was reduced to extreme poverty, by certain shabby superfluities in his dress: for, notwithstanding that it was a very sultry day for the time of the year, he wore a loose great coat and a muff, with a long campaign wig out of curl, to which he added the ornament of a pair of black garters buckled under the knee." Two points are worthy of note in this sketch as marking progress toward more fully developed character portrayal: the revelation of character

through the conversation of the person depicted, and the emphasis upon oddities in appearance and manner.

Group-description in the *Tatler* and *Spectator* is of particular interest because of its effect upon the nineteenth century essayists. Such description consists of sketches of individuals who constitute a group, as members of a club, fellow-travelers in a stage-coach, etc. Not only the individuals, but their setting is clearly delineated. The characters frequently reveal themselves through conversation or dialogue and the whole is told in the familiar manner of one intimately associated with the group. The readers' interest is heightened by the odd contrasts presented, the individual eccentricities, and the strokes of character-drawing which show certain traits as typical. In *Tatler* No. 132, the members of the club at the Trumpet are characterized in humorous fashion, and well-known types in London clubdom are drawn in a few bold strokes, such as Major Matchlock "who served in the last civil wars, and has all the battles by heart," honest old Dick Reptile who speaks little himself but laughs at the jokes of others, and Sir Jeoffery Notch who calls every thriving man a pitiful upstart. Such brief sketches were the forerunners of the more extended character portrayals, describing members of a group, in the *Spectator*. In the sketches of Sir Roger de Coverley and his friends, there is no longer the attempt to condense portraiture in a single, brief paper, but the picture of the individual, as in the case of Sir Roger, slowly emerges from paper to paper. It would be impossible to separate it from the frame in which it appears and present it as a "character." The setting is elaborated as well as the individual.

The effect of such character delineation upon the familiar essayists of the early nineteenth century is to be seen in the humorous description of members of a group, in the self-revelation of the individual through conversation, and in the manner in which enough of the setting or background is introduced to give the sketch verisimilitude. The character-writing of Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt displays great ingenuity and variety; usually in an essay frame, it shows the influence of both the seventeenth and the eighteenth century.

Lamb's experiments with the "character" detached from the essay, may be seen in his early writings. In his contributions to

the *Reflector*, he treats the "character" (1) as an individual piece of writing and links it to the preceding essay by virtue of similarity in subject matter, as in "The Character of an Undertaker," which follows the essay on "Burial Societies." Here Lamb makes no effort to incorporate the "character" as part of his essay, but unites the two by means of the following paragraph:

"Looking over some papers lately that fell into my hands by chance, and appear to have been written about the beginning of the last century, I stumbled, among the rest, upon the following short Essay, which the writer calls '*The Character of an Undertaker.*' It is written with some stiffness and peculiarities of style, but some parts of it, I think, not unaptly characterize the profession to which Mr. Middleton has the honour to belong. The writer doubtless had in mind the entertaining character of *Sable*, in Steele's excellent comedy of the *Funeral.*"<sup>71</sup>

(2) As part of an essay, as in "The Good Clerk, a Character" which forms the entire first part of the essay of that name, the latter part of which is devoted to comment on Daniel Defoe's *The Complete English Tradesman*. As in "The Character of an Undertaker" there is a paragraph which serves to unite the "character" and the essay. In this instance Lamb has reversed the arrangement, placing the "character" first, and has unified his subject matter. This unity pertains not only to the theme, but to the satirical tone of the whole. Lamb does not draw upon dramatic portraiture for his "character," as in "The Undertaker," but upon his personal experience. For who can doubt that Lamb, with his tongue in his cheek, had in mind the requirements for clerks in a counting house such as the India House where he was employed, and not those maxims "inculcated and instilled into the breasts of the London Apprentices," the recollections of which he claims were responsible for this "character." It was sketched, he tells us, "in an interval of business, to divert some of the melancholy hours of a Counting House," and is "little a creature of fancy."<sup>72</sup> In these two "characters" Lamb reveals himself a master of the form. Like Overbury, whose *Characters* was among Lamb's favorite vol-

<sup>71</sup>*Works*, vol. I, p. 95.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 129.

umes, he allies the "character" with an occupation. In style Lamb's two "characters" differ. That of the "Undertaker" closely follows the traditional manner: short, balanced sentences objectively setting forth the characteristics of the type. In the "Clerk" Lamb is obviously experimenting; he uses longer sentences and occasionally introduces comments of his own, thus giving the "character" a more familiar tone, as may be seen from the following:

"The Good Clerk.—He writeth a fair and swift hand, and is completely versed in the Four First Rules of Arithmetic, in the Rule of Three (which is sometimes called the Golden Rule) and in Practice. We mention these things, that we may leave no room for cavillers to say, that any thing essential hath been omitted in our definition; else to speak the truth, these are but ordinary accomplishments, and such as every understrapper at a desk is commonly furnished with. The character we treat of soareth higher."<sup>73</sup>

Lamb may have written these "characters" for the *Morning Post* and have found no opportunity to print them there. In a letter to Coleridge (October 11, 1802) he speaks of Bishop Hall's *Characters*, which he says: "I know nothing about, having never seen them." In the same letter he writes: "I dare say I could find many things, of a light nature, to suit that paper." [*The Morning Post*.]<sup>74</sup> The inference is that Coleridge suggested the "character" as a form upon which Lamb might try his pen.

There is a space of some years between Lamb's "characters" contributed to the *Reflector* and the character-sketches which form part of many of the Elia essays. We do not know whether in the interval Lamb continued to experiment with the form. After the *Reflector* papers he produced little for several years that added to his reputation as an essayist. Between the last *Reflector* paper in 1812, and the first Elia essay in 1820, his literary output with the exception of his first essay on Christ's Hospital (1813) and the "Confessions of a Drunkard" consisted mainly of brief para-

<sup>73</sup> Op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>74</sup> *Life, Letters and Writings of Charles Lamb*, ed. by Percy Fitzgerald, vol. I, p. 417. •

graphs, reviews, dramatic criticism and epigrammatic verse, written for the most part at the instigation of Leigh Hunt.

In certain of the Elia essays Lamb employs the "character" in an essay framework, using it to give variety of style, and a pointed conciseness to his descriptions. The many ways in which he uses the form to portray what the person does, what he says and how he looks, show that he was continually experimenting. For example he introduces a "character" in the midst of an essay in such manner that it might be removed intact and remain a complete "character" as in "Imperfect Sympathies"; or he interrupts the "character" to interpolate other material, as in "The Old and New School-Master." He frequently interjects his own opinions, thereby giving a familiar tone to his character-writing. Unlike the seventeenth century writers he does not make use of far-fetched conceits, but his "characters" reflect his all-pervading humor and sympathy, be it a beggar he is describing, or his constitutional enemy, the "true Caledonian." Like the eighteenth century character-writers, Lamb pictures the individual through the type. Those "characters" in the Elia essays which most nearly preserve the traditional form will be discussed first.

In "A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis" Lamb has drawn the "character" of a beggar who was a common figure in the London streets. He has epitomized the type with characteristic grace and sympathy, touched with humor: "Rags, which are the reproach of poverty, are the Beggar's robes, and graceful *insignia* of his profession, his tenure, his full dress, the suit in which he is expected to show himself in public. He is never out of the fashion, or limpeth awkwardly behind it. He is not required to put on court mourning. He weareth all colours, fearing none. His costume hath undergone less change than the Quaker's. He is the only man in the universe who is not obliged to study appearances."<sup>75</sup> This "character" in an essay frame adds variety and interest to the paper. Its rhythmic quality is marked, a feature likewise observable in Earle's "characters."

"Poor Relations" Lamb opens with an extended "character" describing a poor relation. Instead of a general definition of the

<sup>75</sup> *Works*, vol. II, p. 116.

form. In "Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist" Lamb has drawn an unforgettable portrait of old Sarah Battle, "who next to her devotions, loved a good game of whist." The portraiture is as distinctive as that of Chaucer. Lamb is here representing not a type but an individual. He secures his effect by means of short sentences having parallelism of structure as in the "character." The following passage will serve to illustrate the method and its effectiveness:

"She took, and gave, no concessions. She hated favors. She never made a revoke, nor ever passed it over in her adversary without exacting the utmost forfeiture. She fought a good fight; cut and thrust. She held not her good sword (her cards) 'like a dancer.' She sat bolt upright; and neither showed you her cards, nor desired to see yours." <sup>77</sup>

Another portrait in Lamb's gallery which shows "character" influence is that of his brother John, who goes disguised as James Elia, a cousin, in "Poor Relations." Of him Lamb says: "The pen of Yorick and of none since his, could have drawn J. E. entire—those fine Shandian lights and shades, which make up his story. I must limp after in my poor antithetical manner, as the fates have given me grace and talent." <sup>78</sup> Elia's "antithetical manner" owes its inspiration to the "character." Lamb also employed the "character" form in his sketch of himself: "A Character of the Late Elia. By a Friend" which appeared in the *London Magazine*, 1823, and was later printed as the "Preface" to the *Last Essays*.

The preceding examples serve to show that Lamb derived his technique in character-writing from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The secret of his success in character delineation however is not one of technique alone, but is owing to his sympathetic understanding of those with whom he came in contact, and his ability to discover those qualities in the ordinary man which lift him out of the commonplace and invest him with interest. Lamb's understanding of people reflects one of the strongest tendencies of the Romantic Revival,—that of sympathy with man.

Hazlitt's use of the "character" shows less variety than Lamb's. We seek vainly in Hazlitt for those oddities of style characteristic

<sup>77</sup> *Works*, vol. II, pp. 32-33.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

of the seventeenth century writers. Unlike Lamb he had no affinity with these writers, and expressed his preference for those papers of Elia in which there is the least infusion of antiquated language. This, however, does not imply that Hazlitt employed the "character" less effectively than Lamb. The form lent itself admirably to the ironic portrayal of those types of persons with whom he had little sympathy or patience. He delights, for instance, in depicting the scholar with all his peculiarities. Midway in his essay "On the Ignorance of the Learned" he draws an extended "character" of a pedant. The form, by reason of its conciseness, proved a ready medium for the heaped-up exaggeration of which Hazlitt was a master. The learned man is set before us in his detachment from the ordinary things of life, and in his preoccupation with learning for learning's sake: "He thinks and cares nothing about his next-door neighbours, but he is deeply read in the tribes and casts of the Hindoos and Calmuc Tartars. He can hardly find his way into the next street, though he is acquainted with the exact dimensions of Constantinople or Peking. He does not know whether his oldest acquaintance is a knave or a fool, but he can pronounce a pompous lecture on all the principal characters in history. . . . He cannot give a satisfactory answer to the plainest question, nor is he ever in the right in any of his opinions, upon any one matter of fact that really comes before him, and yet he gives himself out for an infallible judge on all those points, of which it is impossible that he or any other person living should know anything but by conjecture."<sup>79</sup> The exaggeration of the qualities of the type in this description serves the same purpose as caricature: it emphasizes the essential characteristics.

Hazlitt draws a more sympathetic picture of a learned man in his essay "The Shyness of Scholars."<sup>80</sup> He describes here not the individual but the type, yet so true is the drawing to known facts in Hazlitt's own life that the individual is pictured through the type. The scholar is contrasted at length with the "mere man of business or fashion"; his attributes are carefully set forth, his attitude toward society is minutely analyzed, until the reasons for his

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<sup>79</sup> *Works*, vol. VI, p. 73.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. XII, p. 68 f.

shyness are all accounted for. After describing a scholar in the abstract, Hazlitt illustrates the type by means of two concrete examples: Gray and Porson. In this instance the "character" is completely identified with the essay, and it would be difficult to separate it from its context without violating unity.

In his second paper on "The Conversation of Authors"<sup>81</sup> Hazlitt contrasts the character of a scholar with that of a gentleman. The characterization is brief and might be removed from its essay frame and remain intact. The plan is again followed of first presenting abstractly the attributes of a scholar, and then illustrating these qualities by a concrete example, in this instance by a description of George Dyer, friend of both Hazlitt and Lamb. The use of simile in this sketch is particularly to be noted. Of George Dyer, Hazlitt says: "He hangs like a film and cobweb upon letters, or is like the dust upon the outside of knowledge, which should not be rudely brushed aside. He follows learning as its shadow; but as such, he is respectable. He browses on the husk and leaves of books, as the young fawn browses on the bark and leaves of trees. . . . He reads the world, like a favourite volume, only to find beauties in it, or like an edition of some old work which he is preparing for the press, only to make emendations in it, and to correct the errors that have inadvertently slipped in."<sup>82</sup>

Hazlitt sometimes employs contrast to make his "characters" more effective, as in his essay "On Effeminacy of Character." In this he develops three "characters": the effeminate character, and "another branch" of it,—the trifling or dilatory character, and the contrasting type, the firm or decisive character. Hazlitt's interest in analyzing character traits is here also apparent. In the effeminate, the want of energy "arises from the habitual and inveterate predominance of other feelings and motives"; in the dilatory it is "an inherent natural defect of vigour of nerve and voluntary power."<sup>83</sup> The decisive character is one "who knows his own mind and sticks to it; who sees at once what is to be done in given circumstances and does it."<sup>84</sup> In his intense preoccupation

<sup>81</sup> *Works*, vol. VII, p. 35.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 252.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.



with probing beneath outward appearances to the underlying reality, and in his exaltation of the person who sees what is to be done and does it, Hazlitt is very like Carlyle.

Hazlitt also selects as the object of his scorn the good-natured man.<sup>85</sup> This type would seem to warrant praise rather than blame, but Hazlitt strips the character bare of its shallowness, and reveals the underlying selfishness. "A good-natured man is utterly unfit for any situation or office in life that requires integrity, fortitude or generosity,—any sacrifice except of opinion, or any exertion but to please. . . . He will not forego the smallest gratification to save the whole world. He makes his own convenience the standard of right and wrong. He avoids the feeling of pain in himself, and shuts his eyes to the suffering of others."<sup>86</sup> Hazlitt ends his essay with the "character" of an Irishman. The Irish too are "good-natured" and their virtues are those of the heart, not of the head.

Although Hazlitt selected for his character-studies those types with which he was not in sympathy, or who merited his just indignation, this does not argue lack of sympathy. His ability to penetrate beneath surface characteristics enabled him to reveal certain qualities which to the casual observer would remain hidden. "On Londoners and Country People," for example, contains the "character" of a true Cockney, described as one who "has never travelled beyond the purlieu of the Metropolis, either in the body or the spirit."<sup>87</sup> He is the embodiment of the city: "There is a glare, a perpetual hubbub, a noise, a crowd about him; he sees and hears a vast number of things and knows nothing. He is pert, raw, ignorant, conceited, ridiculous, shallow, contemptible."<sup>88</sup> But the x-ray of Hazlitt's observation reveals the true Cockney as something more than contemptible, for he is possessed of imagination, he "lives in a world of romance—a fairy-land of his own," which he creates from the gorgeous, busy, glowing scene around him. Hazlitt also humorously pictures the Cockney in the country, where "between sheepishness and conceit, he is in a very ludicrous situation."

<sup>85</sup> "On Good Nature," *Works*, vol. I, p. 100 f.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 66.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

In contrast to the picture of the Cockney, is that of the rustic in Hazlitt's "Character of the Country People." Although not written in the form of a "character" the entire essay is an analysis of the characteristics of country people, whose narrowness, ignorance, rudeness, intolerance, conceit are set forth in detail. It is an uncompromising picture, and one which is not softened by the sympathetic attitude toward the humble man, characteristic of the Romantic Revival. Hazlitt finds in the rustic a very different person from the one Wordsworth pictures. "The spinsters and the knitters in the sun, and the free maids that weave their thread with bones," observes Hazlitt, "may indeed relieve the welcome pedlar of his wares, his laces, his true-love-knots, or penny-Ballads, but they will have nothing to say to the Lyrical Ballads, nor will the united counties of Westmorland, Cumberland, and Durham, subscribe to lighten the London warehouses of a single copy of the *Excursion*." <sup>89</sup>

This method of depicting type-characteristics is also to be found in Hazlitt's essay "On Corporate Bodies." Men in the aggregate are described, together with the attributes which distinguish the group. This is a different kind of group-description from that already referred to in connection with Lamb. Hazlitt does not sketch the individual members of a group, but details those attributes common to a group; he delineates a composite type and not an individual type. He makes this distinction clear: "Corporate bodies are more corrupt and profligate than individuals, because they have more power to do mischief, and are less amenable to disgrace or punishment. They feel neither shame, remorse, gratitude, nor good-will. The principle of private or natural conscience is extinguished in each individual . . . and nothing is considered but how the united efforts of the whole . . . may be best directed to the obtaining of political advantages and privileges to be shared as common spoil. . . . Public bodies are so far worse than the individuals composing them, because the *official* takes place of the *moral sense*." <sup>90</sup> In the same essay Hazlitt characterizes the individual requirements for admission to a corporate body. The person who would form part of such a body "must be a concen-

<sup>89</sup> *Works*, vol. XI, p. 311.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. 264, 265.

trated essence, a varnished, powdered, representative of the vices, absurdities, hypocrisy, jealousy, pride and pragmatism of his party." <sup>91</sup> Such concise, figurative description is similar to that employed by Lamb in the opening paragraph of "Poor Relations."

In his essay "On Respectable People," Hazlitt again singles out a type which merits his scorn. He defines respectability as meaning "a man's situation and success in life, not his character or conduct." He analyzes the qualities of the successful man, and illustrates them by citing certain characters from Fielding. Again no attempt is made to follow the rhetorical form of the "character," but the abstract qualities differentiating the type are set forth in a manner which clearly indicates "character" influence.

Another of Hazlitt's essays which delineates a type is "On People with One Idea." The man obsessed with a topic which he insists upon discussing in season and out of season is humorously portrayed. Figurative language again lends force and vividness to the thought: "A topic of this sort, of which the person himself may be considered as almost sole proprietor and patentee, is an estate for life, free from all incumbrance of wit, thought, or study; you live upon it as a settled income; and others might as well think to eject you out of a capital freehold house and estate as think to drive you out of it into the wide world of common sense and argument." <sup>92</sup> Anecdote is also freely employed to add interest to the essay. In an easy, conversational manner, Hazlitt recalls stories of people with one idea, and his own evident enjoyment in the telling adds to that of the reader.

One of the most interesting uses which Hazlitt makes of the "character" is to personify an abstract quality, as in his essay "On Fashion." Here he secures his effect by a multiplication of adjectives and substantives descriptive of the matter under consideration: "Fashion is the abortive issue of vain ostentation and exclusive egotism: it is haughty, trifling, affected, servile, despotic, mean, and ambitious, precise and fantastical, all in a breath—tied to no rule, and bound to conform to every whim of the minute. . . . It is a sublimated essence of levity, caprice, vanity, extravagance, idleness, and selfishness." <sup>93</sup>

<sup>91</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 267.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. XI, p. 438.

Hazlitt returns to the subject of fashion in his "character" of a man of fashion which forms part of his essay "On the Conversation of Lords." The use of simile is particularly effective in this "character." The man of fashion is compared to a child at a fair who "gets into a round-about of knowledge till his head becomes giddy, runs from sight to sight, from booth to booth, and like the child, goes home loaded with trinkets, gew-gaws and rattles."<sup>94</sup>

Hazlitt, like Lamb, describes himself in the form of a "character." His mood in this essay ("On Living to One's Self") is a lyrical one, and in giving expression to his own feeling, he is also voicing a mood characteristic of the familiar essayist. The love of contemplation, of nature and the changing seasons, of books and good conversation,—the sources from which the familiar essayist draws his inspiration, is sung by Hazlitt. He who lives wisely to himself does not want to mingle in the fray. "He reads the clouds, he looks at the stars, he watches the return of the seasons, the falling leaves of autumn, the perfumed breath of spring, starts with delight at the note of a thrush in a copse near him, sits by the fire, listens to the moaning of the wind, pores upon a book, or discourses the freezing hours away, or melts down hours to minutes in pleasing thought. . . . He hardly knows what he is capable of, and is not in the least concerned whether he shall ever make a figure in the world. . . . He is free as air, and independent as the wind."<sup>95</sup>

Hazlitt also possessed the art of drawing individuals as well as types. His early efforts as a portrait painter developed his powers of observation and his natural ability to read character, and to analyze individual traits. In his essay "On the Imitation of Nature," he has compared the art of the portrait painter and that of the biographer: "Portrait painting is the biography of the pencil, and he who gives most of the peculiarities and details, with most of the general character,—that is of *keeping*,—is the best biographer, and the best portrait-painter."<sup>96</sup> Hazlitt, like Lamb, was skilful in rapidly striking off the essential characteristics of

<sup>94</sup> *Works*, vol. XII, p. 49

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. 91-92.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. XI, p. 221.

the individual members of a group. "On Coffee-House Politicians" contains several brief character-sketches, for example: E——, a Tory, always in the wrong, "an everlasting babbler on the stronger side of the question—querulous and dictatorial"; K—— the radical reformer and logician, who if there was but one side of a question would always be in the right; and M——, "that sturdy old English character, a lover of truth and justice." M—— is drawn at some length, and is a vivid figure as he sits with his glass in his hand, looking straight before him, an attitude significant of the candor and uprightness of his mind, "which can neither be wheedled nor brow-beat into unjustifiable complaisance."<sup>97</sup>

Such portraiture consists in selecting the essential characteristics of an individual, and describing them with the greatest economy. There is almost no attempt to picture the outward man. Details of dress and of manner are usually left to the imagination. The background is left hazy. Hazlitt is engaged in portraying the mental characteristics of the individual, the twists of his mind, his deep-rooted prejudices. He makes his sketch graphic by the use of figurative language, as when he says of the radical reformer: "He has the new light strong upon him, and he knocks other people down with its solid beams."<sup>98</sup>

Like La Bruyère, Hazlitt, through his individual portraits, is able to portray the type. Thus E—— is typical of the ingrained Tory, deriving all his opinions from custom and authority; K—— of the radical reformer and logician; M——, the "lover of truth and justice," liberal in opinion. Hazlitt frequently follows the delineation of a type by the sketch of an individual who is illustrative of the type. He makes use of this method in his essay "On Paradox and Commonplace." The followers of tradition and those who seize upon every new-fangled idea are characterized, and Shelley is described as representative of the latter type. Hazlitt again makes use of highly figurative language: "The author of the *Prometheus Unbound* . . . has a fire in his eye, a fever in his blood, a maggot in his brain, a hectic flutter in his speech, which mark out the philosophical fanatic. . . . His bending, flexible form

<sup>97</sup> *Works*, vol. VI, p. 199.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

appears to take no strong hold of things, does not grapple with the world about him, but slides from it like a river—

'And in its liquid texture mortal wound  
Receives no more than can the fluid air.' <sup>99</sup>

In "On the Conversation of Authors" Hazlitt has left delightful thumb-nail sketches of Hunt and Lamb. Hunt's portrait is admirably drawn in a single sentence, which Hazlitt concludes with the penetrating observation that if Hunt has a fault, it is that he "is fond of being looked up to, without considering by whom." <sup>100</sup>

Hazlitt had a peculiar genius for character-portrayal, whether he made use of the "character" to delineate a type, or whether he sketched an individual. In each instance his method is a concise one. His interest is in mental characteristics and in analyzing the causes of individual action. Although he frequently delineates types which are beyond the pale of his sympathy, his ability to render truthfully whatever he observed, makes his sketches noteworthy for accuracy of presentation, and freedom from individual bias. His use of the "character" is not as varied as that of Lamb, but by means of it, and the character-sketch, richly adorned with metaphor, simile and anecdote, he gives additional interest to his essays.

Leigh Hunt was interested in both the literary "portrait," and the "character." While in prison he read Bishop Earle's *Characters*, and thought them "sensible and witty, but too much sought out, like most of those things." <sup>101</sup> As early as 1815 he tried his hand at the literary portrait, and in his essay "On Washer-women" makes some interesting comparisons between the portrait created by the writer and that of the artist. "Writers," he says, "might oftener indulge themselves . . . in detached sketches of men and things, which should be to *manners* what those of Theophrastus are to *character*." <sup>102</sup> "Between the matter-of-fact works of the Dutch artists, and the subtle compositions of Hogarth, there seems to be a medium reserved only for the pen. The writer only can tell

<sup>99</sup> Op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., vol. VII, p. 38.

<sup>101</sup> *Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, vol. 1, p. 80.

<sup>102</sup> *The Seer*, vol. II, p. 157.

you all he means—can let you into his whole mind and intention. The moral insinuations of the painter are, on the one hand, apt to be lost for want of distinctness; or tempted, on the other, by their visible nature, to put on too gross a shape.”<sup>103</sup> “It is the writer only who, without hurting the most delicate propriety of the representation, can leave no doubt of all his intentions, who can insinuate his object, in two or three words, to the dullest conception; and, in conversing with the most foreign minds, take away all the awkwardness of interpretation.”<sup>104</sup>

In searching for a model for such sketches, Hunt thought first of Sterne, then of Steele, “the greatest master of detached portraits,” and of Shenstone, whose *School-Mistress* would seem to express best what Hunt had in mind, until he remembered Chaucer. “Alas!” he says, “we thought to be doing something a little original, and find it all existing already, and in unrivalled perfection, in his portraits of the Canterbury Pilgrims! We can only dilate, and vary upon his principle.”<sup>105</sup> Like Chaucer, Hunt often turned to humble life; he describes the waiter, the maid-servant, washerwoman, etc. The similarity of Hunt’s character sketches to those of Chaucer is also to be seen in their minute details. In “The Maid-Servant”<sup>106</sup> for example, the picture is drawn by means of a number of small details. First the maid’s outward appearance is described, then her possessions, the interior of her room, what she does as she goes about her work, and finally her favorite amusements when she takes a holiday. “The Waiter”<sup>107</sup> might be called a companion piece to “The Maid-Servant.” “We felt irresistibly impelled to sketch him,” Hunt says, “like a portrait-painter who comes suddenly upon an old friend, or upon an old servant of the family. . . . We speak of the waiter properly and generally so called, —the representative of the whole, real, official race.”<sup>108</sup> The sketch Hunt draws is that of an individual as well as a type. He describes the mannerisms and appearance of a particular waiter in

<sup>103</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>106</sup> *The Indicator*, pt. 2, p. 117 f.

<sup>107</sup> *The Seer*, vol. 1, p. 175 f.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

a humorous and vivid manner. He again turns to humble life in his paper "The Butcher,"<sup>100</sup> which has more of an essay frame than "The Maid-Servant" or "The Waiter." After philosophizing on the butcher's taking of animal life, and its analogy in nature, Hunt draws a brief picture of a butcher, which is more of a type description than the portraiture in the essays previously discussed. Hunt's sketches are seldom analytical like those of Hazlitt, nor have they the depth of sympathy characteristic of Lamb, but they are full of shrewd observation, are felicitously phrased and frequently humorous.

Hunt, like Lamb, was fascinated by the sights and sounds of London street life. He likes to describe the shop windows and the passing throngs, and to single out odd figures for comment. In his essay "Twelfth Night" he draws a "street portrait" of an urchin, which in its sympathetic understanding of boy life is a companion piece to Lamb's chimney-sweeper. He whimsically describes this child of the streets as "the nightingale of mud and cold;—one of those equivocal animal-spirits of the streets who come whistling along, you know not whether thief or errand-boy, sometimes with bundle and sometimes not, in corduroys, a jacket, and a cap, or bit of hat, with hair sticking through a hole in it."

A more extended sketch also drawn from common life, is that of "Seamen on Shore,"<sup>110</sup> in which Hunt describes sailors as well as their officers. The source of the material for this essay we learn from Hunt's *Autobiography*: the sailor was a son of his nurse at Christ Hospital, and the officer a connection by marriage.<sup>111</sup> The seaman on shore is described in detail as to his appearance and the manner in which he spends his time. Hunt may have got the suggestion for his sketch from Chaucer's description of a "Shipman," in the *Canterbury Tales*, which Hunt quotes at the close of his essay, with the observation that Chaucer's shipman "is exactly of the same cast as the modern sailor,—the same robustness, courage, and rough-drawn virtue, doing its duty, without being very nice in helping itself to its recreations."<sup>112</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Op. cit., p. 180 f.

<sup>110</sup> *Indicator*, pt. 1, p. 164 f.

<sup>111</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 250.

<sup>112</sup> *Indicator*, pt. 1, p. 169.



Hunt, however, did not confine himself to low life in his character-sketches. In "The Old Lady," he has drawn a sympathetic and exquisite picture of an old gentlewoman. Particularly interesting is the manner in which he creates a background for his figure. He describes the two rooms which the old lady generally occupies, and in telling of the articles which adorn them, he contrives a perfect setting for their occupant. The Dresden shepherds and shepherdesses on the mantel-piece, the toilet-table with its snow-white drapery of muslin, the bits of ribbons and laces, and linen smelling of lavender in the bureau are described in detail. Although Hunt probably had an actual person in mind, he delineates in the "old lady" a type, as true to life today as when written: "She thinks the young women of the present day too forward, and the men not respectful enough; but hopes her grandchildren will be better; though she differs with her daughter in several points respecting their management. She sets little value on the new accomplishments, is a great though delicate connoisseur in butcher's meat and all sorts of housewifery."<sup>113</sup>

Hunt reprints in his *A Book for a Corner*, a paper of Mackenzie's called "An Old Country House and an Old Lady" (*Lounger*, No. 87). In this essay a charming character-sketch is given of an old lady, mistress of an English country house. The attention paid to detail in describing the background of this "portrait," and the naming of books in the old lady's library are features which also characterize Hunt's sketch. It seems reasonable to suppose that Hunt, although in no sense imitative, followed the technique of Mackenzie, who also spoke of his sketch as "a portrait."

Hunt's "Old Gentleman"<sup>114</sup> is a worthy companion piece to the "Old Lady." The original of the portrait may have been Benjamin West, the painter, at whose home Hunt visited when a child. In his *Autobiography* Hunt recalls being greatly mortified in his youth when Mr. West offered him half-a-crown if he would solve the question of "Who was the father of Zebedee's children." In his essay Hunt says of the old gentleman: "He asks little boys in general who was the father of Zebedee's children." The method of portraiture is similar to that in the "Old Lady." The appear-

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<sup>113</sup> *Indicator*, pt. 2, p. 123.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* pt. 1, p. 138 f.

ance, the habits, the likes and dislikes of the old gentleman are described with an eye for small details which make a finished picture. The following description of the old gentleman will serve to illustrate Hunt's method.

"He is very clean and neat; and, in warm weather, is proud of opening his waistcoat half-way down and letting so much of his frill be seen, in order to show his hardiness as well as taste. His watch and shirt-buttons are of the best; and he does not care if he has two rings on a finger. . . . He has a small cocked hat for gala days, which he lifts higher from his head than the round one, when bowed to. In his pocket are two handkerchiefs (one for the neck at night-time), his spectacles and his pocket-book. The pocket-book, among other things, contains a receipt for a cough, and some verses cut out of an odd sheet of an old magazine, on the lovely Duchess of A."<sup>115</sup>

Hunt's character sketches in general show more the influence of the periodical essayists than of the seventeenth century "character" writers. Among his early papers, published originally in the *Reflector* (1811) is "Bad Temper and Other Disorders" which contains sketches in the manner of the *Tatler* and *Spectator* of the ill-tempered man, the envious man, and of the miser. Although he occasionally employs short balanced sentences in his descriptions, his sketches usually are not written in the form of "characters." Two of his essays, however, "A Now, Descriptive of a Hot Day,"<sup>116</sup> and "A Now, Descriptive of a Cold Day,"<sup>117</sup> show the influence of a seventeenth century character-writer, Nicholas Breton, who as has already been mentioned, introduced a novelty into character-writing by his characterization of the seasons. In both of these essays Hunt uses a balanced sentence structure, and secures emphasis and unity by the use of the word "now" to begin his sentences. Hunt says the use of "now" was suggested to him "by the striking convenience it affords descriptive writers, such as Thomson and others, who are fond of beginning their paragraphs with it, thereby saving themselves a world of trouble in bringing about a nicer conjunction of the various parts of their subject."

<sup>115</sup> Op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pt. 2, p. 17 f.

<sup>117</sup> *The Seer*, vol. 2, p. 67 f.

For "‘A Now,’ Descriptive of a Hôt Day," Hunt got suggestions from Keats, the essay being written when the two friends were living together. In both of these papers, descriptive of the seasons, Hunt shows himself to have been as keen an observer of nature as he was of people.

In addition to his longer character-sketches, many of Hunt's essays contain brief descriptions of individuals or types, as that of the stage-coachman, which forms part of his paper, "Coaches,"<sup>118</sup> and of washerwomen in "On Washerwomen."<sup>119</sup>

Hunt's interest was not in character analysis but in describing the individual or type as to outward appearance, setting, likes and dislikes, etc. He not only liked to describe people, but things, the seasons, the weather. He frequently delineates character, but the well-springs of individual acts are not sought, nor is there much probing beneath the surface. Hunt's particular skill consists in an enumeration of details often seemingly insignificant, whose total effect is to give a finished picture. This implies a seeing eye, and the ability to select what is most significant, as well as the talent to describe graphically. Hunt believed in the advantage of the writer over the painter to suggest by means of words what it is impossible to portray through line and color: "What painting gains in universality to the eye, it loses by an infinite proportion in power of suggestion to the understanding. . . . The beauty of this unlimited power of suggestion in writing is, that you may take up the driest and most commonplace of all possible subjects, and strike a light out of it to warm your intellect and your heart by."<sup>120</sup>

The "character" and the character-sketch not only add to the interest of the essays of Lamb, Hazlitt, and Hunt, but definitely contribute to the development of the essay. Although Hazlitt and Hunt make frequent use of the character-sketch, its most marked effect upon the development of the familiar essay is to be seen in Lamb's *Elia* papers. Of these fifty-one essays, about a third contain either "characters" or character-sketches, or both. In six of them: "Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist," "Captain Jackson," "My Relations," "Old China," "The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple,"

<sup>118</sup> *Indicator*, pt. 2, p. 32 f.

<sup>119</sup> *The Seer*, vol. 2, p. 157 f.

<sup>120</sup> "On Washerwomen," *Ibid.*, pp. 160-61.

and "The South-Sea House," the character-sketch forms practically the entire essay. It is worthy of note that in all these instances the sketches are of actual people—relatives, friends or acquaintances of Lamb's. In other of his papers where the character-sketch forms only part of the essay, Lamb has also written of people he knew. In "Oxford in the Vacation," and "Amicus Redivivus" he writes of his friend, George Dyer; in "Two Races of Men," he describes John Fenwick under guise of Ralph Bigod; "Christ's Hospital" contains sketches of both masters and students whom Lamb knew in his school days; John Braham the great tenor is described in "Imperfect Sympathies"; an incident in the life of Fanny Kelly, the actress, is told in "Barbara S——"; Favell, a school-fellow of Lamb's, is sketched in "Poor Relations," and the "crew" is described in the "Old Margate Hoy." Six of the Elia essays contain "characters," which are of particular interest because of the skilful manner in which Lamb incorporates them into his essays, without a definite break in style. But these "characters" can scarcely be said to contribute to the essay's development to the degree that the character-sketches do. Like the eighteenth century essayists, Lamb understood the art of introducing conversation, incident and anecdote into his sketches of people, but he marks an advance over the periodical-essayists in his genius for searching out and reproducing the salient characteristics which distinguish personality, and in his genuinely sympathetic attitude toward his subject. His sketches probe deeper into human nature than those of the earlier essayists. By means of unexpected and frequently witty and humorous observations, Lamb lays bare the mind and heart of the person he is describing. He has the faculty of disclosing foibles and eccentricities which emphasize individuality of character, and at the same time reveal fundamental human qualities. Sympathy might be said to be the keynote of Lamb's character portrayal. He never shows his impatience with human nature as Hazlitt does, but discloses endearing qualities in men's weaknesses. He particularly displays his sympathetic penetration of character in his portraits of his sister Mary (Bridget Elia) and his brother John (James Elia). In "Mackery End, in Hertfordshire" and "Old China," he has drawn a most sympathetic and tender picture of Bridget Elia, his life-long companion. The turn of phrase, the

art with which neither too little nor too much is told, the natural conversational tone of the whole renders the sketch one of the most delightful in the language. The quiet humor which infuses it gains in effect when we consider that it was probably written under Bridget Elia's eye. "I must touch upon the foibles of my kinswoman with a gentle hand," says Lamb, "for Bridget does not like to be told of her faults. She hath an awkward trick (to say no worse of it) of reading in company; at which time she will answer *yes* or *no* to a question, without fully understanding its purport—which is provoking, and derogatory in the highest degree to the dignity of the putter of the said question."<sup>121</sup> It is by means of such observations that Lamb builds up his picture. What light is thrown upon Bridget's tender sensibilities by the incident of her bursting into tears, and complaining that her brother was altered when he spoke to her in tones more kind than ordinary! Lamb however does not confine himself to one method. In "Old China" Bridget's character is revealed through her conversation with her brother, in which she recalls the days when they were very poor and every purchase beyond the necessities represented an adventure. Not an incident is related in these sketches that does not serve to illustrate some characteristic of Bridget Elia or of Elia himself.

Lamb's skill in character-drawing is further shown in his description of his brother in "My Relations" and "Dream Children." He develops the former essay by means of anecdote and incident which throw into relief certain characteristics of James Elia, and reveal his pet hobbies and idiosyncrasies. In a few sentences Lamb creates a humorous picture of a non-conservative nature at odds with itself: "The genuine child of impulse, the frigid philosopher of prudence—the phlegm of my cousin's doctrine is invariably at war with his temperament, which is high sanguine. With always some fire-new project in his brain, J. E. is the systematic opponent of innovation, and crier down of everything that has not stood the test of age and experiment. With a hundred fine notions chasing one another hourly in his fancy, he is startled at the least approach to the romantic in others; and, determined by his own sense in

<sup>121</sup> "Mackery End, in Hertfordshire," *Works*, vol. II, p. 76.

everything, commends *you* to the guidance of common sense on all occasions. With a touch of the eccentric in all which he does, or says, he is only anxious that *you* should not commit yourself by doing any thing absurd or singular."<sup>122</sup> In "Dream Children" Lamb uses the reverie as a means of further adding to his sketch of his brother. He shows a varied technique in his character-portrayal, but in general he achieves his effect by carefully observing, selecting and recording the characteristics of his subject, giving point to his observations by means of anecdote, incident and related conversation. His method is indebted both to biography, and to character portrayal in the eighteenth century novel.

Character-drawing in the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, and other periodicals of their type, usually has some ulterior purpose, and as a rule more interest is shown in making the individual typical, than in revealing his personality. Lamb draws character in the spirit of the creative artist, and in so doing has enriched the essay with portraiture whose individuality and revelation of fundamental human qualities will endure.

### (3) THE LETTER AND THE FAMILIAR ESSAY; THEIR LITERARY RELATIONSHIP

Another marked effect of the eighteenth century periodical essay upon the nineteenth century familiar essay is to be seen in the use of the letter. The introduction of letters into periodical essays is one of their most marked features. It is probable that this practice was an outgrowth of the question and answer column which formed a part of many seventeenth century periodicals. The transition from these columns may be seen in Defoe's *Little Review* where as Professor Graham has pointed out the queries became lengthened into letters and the answers into essays.<sup>123</sup> The letters were from correspondents, real or imaginary, who sought advice on a wide variety of subjects, particularly upon matters of social conduct and affairs of the heart. This feature therefore was already established in periodical writing when Steele

<sup>122</sup> "My Relations," *Works*, vol. II, p. 71.

<sup>123</sup> Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals*, p. 60.

undertook the *Tatler*. Moreover the familiar letter and the essay had long been closely affiliated, so there was literary warrant for combining the two forms. Like many innovations in literature, the familiar letter owes its origin to Latin literature, the debt in this instance being to Seneca's *Epistles to Lucilius*, which Bacon said "are but Essaies—that is dispersed Meditacons though conveyed in the form of Epistles."<sup>124</sup>

The letter was widely used as a literary form on the continent during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and translations of letters into English, notably the *Epistolae Familiares* of Guevara (1575) and Jean Louis De Balzac's letters (published in France 1624), furnished the pattern for English familiar letter-writing. In the seventeenth century many collections of letters were published in England which were of conscious literary intent, and partook of the character of essays. Among these may be mentioned Bishop Hall's "Decades" of letters, the *Epistolae Ho-Eliaanae* of James Howell, Nicholas Breton's *Packet of Mad Lettres*, and the correspondence between Gabriel Harvey and Spenser. The word "letter" and "essay" in time came to be used interchangeably, for a short piece of writing which was familiar in tone.<sup>125</sup>

Thus the periodical essayist found ready at hand in the letter a form so familiar in tone that it was admirably fitted to establish a friendly relation between the author and his audience. This was what Steele and Addison aimed to do; also they wished to preserve anonymity and this too the letter effected, as well as lending verisimilitude to the contents of the paper. Moreover, variety was secured and interest sustained by letters from various correspondents. In the hands of Addison and Steele, the letter proved a medium for the discussion of various topics. Not only did they use it to satirize the vices and follies of society, but for theatrical and literary criticism, and for sermonizing. Much of the humor is provided through letters, some of which make no pretense at being authentic, as that from a lion, directed "From my Den in the Hay-market."<sup>126</sup>

<sup>124</sup> *Essays*, Dedication to Prince Henry, 1612 ed. (Arber).

<sup>125</sup> See Harold C. Binkley, "Essays and Letter-Writing," *P.M.L.A.*, vol. XLI, 1926, p. 342 f.

<sup>126</sup> *Spectator*, No. 14.

The letters in the *Tatler* and *Spectator* are introduced in various ways: by means of an introductory paragraph, followed by one or more letters illustrative of the theme, or the letters appear first, followed by comment upon their contents, or again the letter is inserted midway in the essay. Some of the papers are composed entirely of letters, with only a line or so of introduction. Frequently the paper is an answer to a letter, which has been received, but the contents of which are related, not reproduced.

Dr. Johnson also uses the letter form in the *Rambler*, the *Idler* and the *Adventurer*, to call attention to the follies of the age. He assumes a sprightlier tone in the letters than in his essays proper, especially those supposed to be written by women. Frequently the correspondence reveals the character of the writer, as in the letter from Zosima who tells of her experiences in seeking a place as lady's maid.<sup>127</sup>

Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* papers, cast entirely in the form of letters, have already been mentioned; as well as their prototypes, *Lettres Persanes* of Montesquieu, translated into English in 1735, and Horace Walpole's *Letter from Xo Ho, a Chinese Philosopher at London, to his Friend Lien Chi at Peking*, published in 1757. In these works the letter form was used for essay material, and it is very difficult to draw any fine distinction between the two forms. This lack of clear definition is expressed by the Earl of Shaftesbury in his *Characteristicks*:<sup>128</sup> "When he (the author) has writ as many Pages as he likes, or as his Run of Fancy would permit, he then perhaps considers what *Name* he had best to give to his new Writing, whether he should call it Letter, Essay, Miscellany, or ought else. The Bookseller perhaps is to determine this at last, when all, besides the Preface, Epistle Dedicatory, and Title-page is dispatched."

Mr. Binkley in his study of the connection between the familiar letter and the familiar essay makes the following distinction: "The familiar letter, so to speak, is a primary form: that is, while it has antecedents, and shows at different periods of its development

<sup>127</sup> *Rambler*, No. 12.

<sup>128</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. Miscellaneous Reflections, No. 1, Chap. III. Birmingham, 1773.



traces of extensive foreign influence, yet its definitive quality has never altered; it is not a thing of art, but rather personal and innate. Its fundamental quality is the first-person or lyrical mood. The essay, on the other hand, is artificial, a graceful medium of personal expression to a mildly sympathetic public. In it, too, the lyrical element predominates."<sup>129</sup> This view of the familiar letter is a narrow one, and fails to distinguish the letter as a literary form, and to recognize the very important element of art in the letter at its best. It can scarcely be said that letters which deserve to rank as literature are "innate." If by this term is meant "individual in expression," then so is the familiar essay "innate," and the distinction drawn is not a valid one. Another critic clearly distinguishes between the two forms as follows: "The letter, if it be truly a letter and not an essay in disguise, is written to a particular person. It is dual, not single; and the mood is shaped and determined as much perhaps by the recipient as by the writer. The essay is addressed to the impersonal, general reader and is meant to be read by many instead of one; it is public rather than private."<sup>130</sup> Professor MacDonald in his monograph on the English essay says that "to no particular *genre* does it [the letter] more closely ally itself than to the essay." The three chief elements of this union he considers are informality, spontaneity and egotism.<sup>131</sup>

It is obvious that the familiar letter and essay have many points in common, but the essay is addressed to a wider audience, and it does not depend for its effect upon the sympathetic mood of any one individual.

The numerous collections of letters published in the eighteenth century doubtless exerted an influence upon the early nineteenth century familiar essayists through the examples they afforded of a graceful, flexible style which was admirably fitted to the familiar and self-revelatory mood of the writer. They also helped to point

<sup>129</sup> Harold C. Binkley, "Essays and Letter-Writing," *P.M.L.A.*, vol. XLI, 1926, p. 350.

<sup>130</sup> Prof. P. V. D. Shelly. "The Familiar Essay." *University of Pennsylvania Public Lectures*, 1916-17, p. 238.

<sup>131</sup> W. L. MacDonald. "The Beginnings of the English Essay." *University of Toronto Studies*, No. 3, 1914, p. 87.

the way to the union of the essay with the autobiographic sketch and the travel sketch, for many familiar letters were closely allied to these forms, and the essayists could not fail to observe how perfectly the familiar mood could find expression in autobiography, and in personal impressions of places visited.

Chief among the collections which advanced letter-writing to an art are the letters of Horace Walpole, Lord Chesterfield, Swift, Pope, Bolingbroke, Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Cowper and Gray. Important also for their effect upon the style of the essay are the political letters of Swift, "Junius," Walpole, and Burke. The eighteenth century letter was a product of a cultured society, and implied a free interchange of ideas, a delight in social intercourse, and the art of polite conversation. Its adaptability to express mood, sentiment, and the innermost workings of the heart is seen in its use by Richardson in his novels.

In the development of the essay in the early nineteenth century, the letter was an important factor. It set the example for the use of an easy, distinctive style closely allied to good conversation, which could at pleasure be used to depict incident, to portray character, to describe natural objects, and most important of all, to reveal the mood of the writer. There is undoubtedly some inference to be drawn from the fact that Lamb was one of the century's greatest letter-writers as well as one of its greatest essayists. There is abundant evidence of the familiarity of Hazlitt, Lamb and Hunt with the work of the leading letter-writers. Hazlitt has expressed his appreciation of the letter as a literary form: "The letters of eminent men," he says, "make, to our taste, very choice and curious reading; and, except when their publication becomes a breach of honour or decorum, we are always rejoiced to meet with them in print. . . . Letters are certainly the honestest record of great minds, that we can become acquainted with; and we like them the more, for letting us into the follies and treacheries of high life, the secrets of the gay and the learned world and the mysteries of authorship. We are ushered, as it were, behind the scenes of life; and see gay ladies and learned men, the wise, the witty, and the ambitious, in all the nakedness, or undress at least, of their spirits."<sup>182</sup>

<sup>182</sup> "Letters of Horace Walpole," *Works*, vol. 10, p. 161.

Hazlitt's acquaintance with letter-writers ranged from Abelard and Eloise to his contemporaries. References to them are frequent in his essays. He alludes to the *Letters of Junius* no less than thirty-three times, and devotes an essay to the letters of Horace Walpole,<sup>133</sup> whom he calls "the very prince of gossips." His critical comments are pithy and interesting, as when he remarks that "Pope's letters, though extremely elegant, are failures as letters. He wrote them to the world, not to his friends; and they have therefore very much the air of universal secrets."<sup>134</sup> He praises Gray's letters for their observations on life, "full of sagacity and fine understanding"<sup>135</sup> and for their descriptions of natural scenery and Gothic antiquities. "Cowper," he says, "hath unwittingly beguiled us for many a long hour, by his letters to Lady Hesketh. . . . We are much more edified by one letter of Mr. Cowper, than we should be by a week's confinement and hard labour in the metaphysical Bridewell of Mr. Coleridge; and a single letter from the pen of Gray is worth all the pedlar-reasoning of Mr. Wordsworth's Eternal Recluse."<sup>136</sup> It was Burke's *Letter to a Noble Lord* which caused Hazlitt to become a convert to his style—"forked and playful as the lightning, crested like the serpent."<sup>137</sup>

Lamb was familiar with James Howell's *Epistolae Ho-Eliaanae* which may have suggested to him his sketches of London street figures. The letters of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, were among his favorites, and four of his essays contain references to the "high fantastical Duchess." In "The Two Races of Men," Lamb humorously complains of the friendly theft from his library of "the Letters of that princely woman, the thrice noble Margaret Newcastle."<sup>138</sup> He also was familiar with the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montague.<sup>139</sup>

Leigh Hunt was a close student of the eighteenth century letter-writers as may be seen from his essays on Lady Mary Wortley

<sup>133</sup> "Letters of Horace Walpole," *Works*, vol. 10, p. 159 f.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* p. 162.

<sup>137</sup> "On Reading Old Books," *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 228.

<sup>138</sup> *Works*, vol. II, p. 26.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366 (notes).

Montague,<sup>140</sup> and Madame de Sévigné,<sup>141</sup> as well as from his appreciative comments on Gray and other letter-writers in his *A Book for a Corner*. Lady Montague's letters he characterizes as "admirable, better than acute, idiomatical, off-hand, conversational without inelegance, fresh as the laugh on the young cheek, and full of brain."<sup>142</sup> He admired Madame de Sévigné for her sincerity: "Truth, wit, and animal spirits compose the secret of her delightfulness; but truth above all, for it is that which shows all the rest to be true."<sup>143</sup> In *A Book for a Corner* Hunt includes five letters of Gray, which he prefaces by an appreciation: "Gray appears to us to be the best letter-writer in the language. Others equal him in particular qualities, and surpass him in amount of entertainment; but none are so nearly faultless."<sup>144</sup> He follows this with comment upon other letter-writers: Chesterfield, he considers "wants heart, and even his boasted 'delicacy'; Bolingbroke and Pope want simplicity; Cowper is more lively than strong; Shennstone reminds you of too many rainy days, Swift of too many things which he affected to despise; Gibbon too much of the formalist and the *littérateur*."<sup>145</sup> He thought Walpole and Lady Mary Wortley Montague the most amusing of all letter-writers.

Lamb made greater use of the letter in his essays than either Hazlitt or Hunt. His early essay "The Londoner," which first appeared in the *Morning Post* (February 1, 1802), is in the form of a letter addressed to "Mr. Reflector," and is signed "I am, sir, your faithful servant, A Londoner." Lamb was of course following a common practice in thus inditing his essay. It is interesting to compare it with his letter on a similar theme, to see how an idea expressed in a personal letter for an audience of one is metamorphized in style when a larger audience is addressed. A year before "The Londoner" appeared, Lamb in writing to Robert

<sup>140</sup> "Lady Mary Wortley Montague: an Account of Her Life and Writings." *Westminster Review*, 1837. Reprinted in *Men, Women, and Books*.

<sup>141</sup> "Life and Letters of Madame de Sévigné." *Edinburgh Review*, 1842. Reprinted in *Men, Women and Books*.

<sup>142</sup> Leigh Hunt. *Men, Women and Books, A Selection of Sketches, Essays and Critical Memoirs from His Uncollected Prose Writings*, Lond., 1891, p. 345.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 400.

<sup>144</sup> Leigh Hunt, *A Book for a Corner*, Second Series, N. Y., 1859, p. 115.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

Lloyd (February 7, 1801) of his pleasure "in the multitudinous scenes of Life in the crowded streets of ever dear London" had used expressions almost identical with those of the essay.<sup>146</sup> He wrote to Wordsworth (January 30, 1801) and to Manning (November 28, 1800, and early in 1801), in similar vein of the delights of London. In his letter to Manning he lists the city sights which interest him in a manner reminiscent of Sir Thomas Browne: "Streets, streets, streets, markets, theatres, churches, Covent Gardens, shops sparkling with pretty faces of industrious milliners, neat sempstresses, ladies cheapening, gentlemen behind counters lying, authors in the street with spectacles, George Dyers (you may know them by their gait), lamps lit at night, pastry-cooks' and silversmiths' shops, beautiful Quakers of Pentonville, noise of coaches, drowsy cry of mechanic watchman at night, with bucks reeling home drunk; if you happen to wake at midnight, cries of Fire and Stop thief; inns of court, with their learned air, and halls, and butteries, just like Cambridge colleges; old book stalls, Jeremy Taylors, Burtons on Melancholy, and Religio Medicis on every stall. These are thy pleasures, O London with-the-many-sins." <sup>147</sup>

To Wordsworth, Lamb wrote much in the same vein: "I have passed all my days in London, until I have formed as many and intense local attachments, as any of you mountaineers can have done with dead nature. The Lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street, the innumerable trades, tradesmen and customers, coaches, waggons, playhouses, all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden, the very women of the Town, the Watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles,—life awake, if you awake, at all hours of the night, the impossibility of being dull in Fleet Street, the crowds, the very dirt and mud, the Sun shining upon houses and pavements, the print shops, the old book stalls, parsons cheap'ning books, coffee houses, steams of soups from kitchens, the pantomimes, London itself a pantomime and a masquerade,—all these things work themselves into my mind and feed me, without a power of satiating me. The wonder of these sights impells me into night-walks about her crowded streets, and I often shed

<sup>146</sup> E. V. Lucas, ed. *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds*, pp. 144-45.

<sup>147</sup> *Works*, vol. VI, pp. 194-95.

tears in the motley Strand from fulness of joy at so much Life. All these emotions must be strange to you." <sup>148</sup>

When we turn to Lamb's essay, we find it similar in content to the letter, but addressed to a wider audience, and therefore less intimate in style. The mood of the writer however is unchanged; he is frankly and freely expressing his delight in the sights with which he has been familiar since childhood. The intimacy of conversation which carries over into the familiar letter, lends flavor to the essay:

"For my own part, now the *fit* is long past, I have no hesitation in declaring, that a mob of happy faces crouding up at the pit door of Drury-Lane Theatre just at the hour of five, give me ten thousand finer pleasures, than I ever received from all the flocks of *silly sheep*, that have whitened the plains of *Arcadia* or *Epsom Downs*. This passion for crowds is no where feasted so full as in London. The man must have a rare *recipe* for melancholy, who can be dull in Fleet-street. I am naturally inclined to *hypochondria*, but in London it vanishes, like all other ills. Often when I have felt a weariness or distaste at home, have I rushed out into her crowded Strand, and fed my humour, till tears have wetted my cheek for inutterable sympathies with the multitudinous moving picture, which she never fails to present at all hours, like the shifting scenes of a skilful Pantomime."

"The very deformities of London, which give distaste to others, from habit do not displease me. The endless succession of shops, where Fancy (miscalled Folly) is supplied with perpetual new gauds and toys, excite in me no puritanical aversion. I gladly behold every appetite supplied with its proper food. The obliging customer, and the obliged tradesman—things which live by bowing, and things which exist but for homage, do not affect me with disgust; from habit I perceive nothing but urbanity, where other men, more refined, discover meanness. I love the very smoke of London, because it has been the medium most familiar to my vision." <sup>149</sup>

The above passages have been quoted at length, because they serve to show the close union between the familiar letter and the

<sup>148</sup> Op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., vol. I, pp. 401-02.

familiar essay. It is as if we went "behind scenes" with the author and saw the raw material of his paper take form. This alchemy of the letter into the essay was effected by Lamb in several instances: "On the Ambiguities arising from Proper Names";<sup>150</sup> "On the Custom of Hissing at the Theatre, with some account of a Club of Damned Authors";<sup>151</sup> "The Two Races of Men";<sup>152</sup> "The Last Peach";<sup>153</sup> "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig";<sup>154</sup> "A Death-Bed."<sup>155</sup> In three of these essays Lamb takes the topic from a letter and fashions his essay upon it. Thus, the germ of "The Two Races of Men" will be found in a letter to Wordsworth, April 9, 1816, where he says: "I have not bound the poems yet. I wait till People have done borrowing them. I think I shall get a chain, and chain them to my shelves more Bodleiano, and People may come and read them at chain's length. For of those who borrow, some read slow, some mean to read but don't read, and some neither read nor meant to read, but borrow to leave you an opinion of their sagacity."<sup>156</sup>

In a letter to Baron Field (August 31, 1817) Lamb speaks of the difficulties of writing "from one end of the globe to another," because half of the truths in his letters will become lies and some of the lies may become sad realities.<sup>157</sup> This idea forms the nucleus of the *Elia* essay, "Distant Correspondents" addressed to "My dear F."<sup>158</sup>

Writing to Bernard Barton (December 1, 1824),<sup>159</sup> Lamb refers to the fate of Henry Fauntleroy, the banker who was hanged for forgery in 1824. In "The Last Peach" he returns to the subject, and writes in a style similar to the letter. As Mr. Binkley has observed,<sup>160</sup> "here . . . there is a perfect identity of mood in the

<sup>150</sup> *Reflector*, No. 2.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 3.

<sup>152</sup> *London Magazine*, December, 1820.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, April, 1825.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept., 1822.

<sup>155</sup> *Hone's Table Book*, vol. 1, cols. 425-26, 1827. Reprinted in *Last Essays of Elia*, 1833.

<sup>156</sup> *Works*, vol. VI, p. 484.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 501.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 104.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 662 f.

<sup>160</sup> Harold C. Binkley, "Essays and Letter Writing," *P.M.L.A.*, vol. 41, 1926, p. 356.

two versions, the same humorous droop of phrase, and the same wry twist of fanciful notions." Likewise the germ of the Elia essay "Blakesmoor in H-shire" is to be found in a letter written to Southey, October 31, 1799.<sup>161</sup>

In the examples just cited the letters provide little more than themes for the essays. In contrast to these are two other essays of Lamb's of which his letters furnish the entire material. In a letter to Wordsworth (February 1, 1806),<sup>162</sup> Lamb tells the amusing incident of a young man who confused William Robert Spencer (1769-1834), author of *jeux d'esprit* and verse, with the poet Edmund Spenser. We find the same incident recounted in the essay "On the Ambiguities Arising from Proper Names" (*Reflector*, No. 2, 1811).<sup>163</sup> A comparison of the letter with the essay reveals little change, except a more formal arrangement of the material. The following is characteristic of the type of change: *Letter*: "Then pausing, and looking sad, he ejaculated 'Poor Spencer!'" (p. 334). *Essay*: "But presently after, assuming a grave look, he compassionately muttered to himself 'poor Spencer.'" (p. 69). *Letter*: "I begged to know the reason of his ejaculation, thinking that Time had by this time softened down any calamities which the Bard might have endured—'Why, poor fellow!' said he, 'he has lost his Wife!' 'Lost his Wife?' said I, 'Who are you talking of?' 'Why, Spencer,' said he. 'I've read the Monody he wrote on the occasion and a very pretty thing it is.'" (p. 334). *Essay*: "There was something in the tone with which he spoke these words that struck me not a little. It was more like the accent with which a man bemoans some recent calamity that has happened to a friend, than that tone of sober grief with which we lament the sorrows of a person, however excellent, and however grievous his afflictions may have been, who has been dead more than two centuries. I had the curiosity to enquire into the reasons of so uncommon an ejaculation. My young gentleman, with a more solemn tone of pathos than before, repeated 'poor Spencer,' and added 'he has lost his wife.'" (p. 69).,

<sup>161</sup> *Works*, vol. VI, p. 149 f.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332 f.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 69 f.



The other example of close identity between letter and essay is to be found in "A Death Bed—In a Letter to R. H. Esq. of B——." It is not, properly speaking, an essay but was included in the first edition of the *Last Essays of Elia*. It originally appeared in Hone's *Table Book* (vol. 1, cols. 425-26, 1827) signed "L," and dated February 10, 1827. The "essay" is almost identical to a letter written by Lamb to Crabb Robinson (January 20, 1827),<sup>164</sup> describing the death of Randal Norris, whose wife was a friend of Mrs. Field, Lamb's grandmother. The only changes made in the essay are for the purpose of disguising the identity of the family. Of course it would have been impossible to write the essay word for word like the letter if Lamb had not had a copy of the letter before him, which perhaps may be accepted as proof that he made conscious use of letters and was not simply recollecting incidents.

Midway between the instances just cited of letters furnishing the germ of ideas for the essays, and the material of the letter being transferred entire to the essay, is a third treatment of subject matter, in which the incidents related in a letter are used to form *part* of an essay. "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig," in addition to a Chinese fable, contains two incidents: the gift of a pig, and Lamb's childhood generosity to a beggar. Both incidents are to be found in a letter which Lamb wrote to Coleridge, March 9, 1822.<sup>165</sup> It is difficult to determine which is the more delightful, the letter or the essay. It is as if Lamb vied with himself upon a chosen theme. The delicious humor, the intimate, almost tender mood, the highly individual style are the same. Perhaps more than any other instance, this illustrates the occasional identity of the familiar letter with the essay. One example will suffice:

*Letter:* "Teals, wigeons, snipes, barn-door fowl, ducks, geese—your tame villatic things—Welsh mutton, collars of brawn, sturgeon, fresh or pickled, your potted char, Swiss cheeses, French pies, early grapes, muscadines, I impart as freely unto my friends as to myself. They are but self-extended; but pardon me if I stop somewhere—where the fine feeling of benevolence giveth a higher smack than the sensual rarity—there my friends (or any good

<sup>164</sup> *Works*, vol. VII, pp. 720-21.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 561 f.

man) may command me; but pigs are pigs, and I myself therein am nearest to myself. Nay, I should think it an affront, an undervaluing done to Nature who bestowed such a boon upon me, if in a churlish mood I parted with the precious gift."<sup>166</sup>

*Essay*: "Hares, pheasants, partridges, snipes, barn-door chicken (those "tame villatic fowl"), capons, plovers, brawn, barrels of oysters, I dispense as freely as I receive them. I love to taste them, as it were, upon the tongue of my friend. But a stop must be put somewhere. One would not, like Lear, 'give every thing.' I make my stand upon pig. Methinks it is an ingratitude to the Giver of all good flavours, to extra-domiciliate, or send out of the house, slightly, (under pretext of friendship, or I know not what) a blessing so particularly adapted, predestined, I may say, to my individual palate—it argues an insensibility."<sup>167</sup>

Lamb in his early essays modeled upon those of the *Spectator* freely uses the letter form. "On the Inconveniences resulting from being Hanged"<sup>168</sup> is an excellent example of the correspondent's letter-to-the-paper type of essay which Steele and Addison used to such good purpose. Lamb's letter is couched in the same humorous vein as the letters of the periodical essayists; and likewise employs a fictitious signature, a take-off on names drawn from classical lore. It begins in the customary fashion of a correspondent seeking advice: "Sir—I am one of those unhappy persons whose misfortunes, it seems, do not entitle them to the benefit of pure pity," and ends: "Permit me to subscribe myself, Mr. Editor, your unfortunate friend, Pensilis." Lamb, in the same essay, employs the device of inserting a letter within a letter, which serves to introduce the "love-lorn" note so characteristic of the eighteenth century correspondents. He begins and ends his letter in the same gay, mock-serious, bantering tone, but interpolates a paragraph in true essay fashion in which the subject of hanging is treated "as a topic." He refers to the politest authors—Shakespeare, Swift, Pope, Prior, Gay, Fielding, Smollett—who have made use of hanging as a source of the ridiculous. He carries on a

<sup>166</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 561.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 125.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 56 f. (Originally appeared in *The Reflector*, No. 2, 1811.)

sort of implied mental dialogue with the editor, and in one instance indicates in italics what the editor would have said to the correspondent. Here we have an excellent example of the letter passing by almost imperceptible degrees into the essay and back again without marked change in style or mood.

Another essay in letter form which reflects the style of the *Spectator* is "Edax on Appetite"<sup>169</sup> in which Lamb addresses "Mr. Reflector" as follows: "I am going to lay before you a case of the most iniquitous persecution that ever poor devil suffered"<sup>170</sup>; and then proceeds to lay bare the secret of his "appetite for food." The paper is evidently a burlesque on a rather common practice of filling up the papers with stories of great eaters,— "those tales," which Lamb says, "are renewed as often as the editors of papers want to fill up a space in their unfeeling columns, of great eaters,— people that devour whole geese and legs of mutton *for wagers*, are sometimes attempted to be drawn to a parallel with my case."<sup>171</sup> The essay is couched in the mannered style of the eighteenth century, and the idea of it may have originated from the exaggerated stories of the hack writers of the period, which are ridiculed by Steele in the *Spectator*. "*Hospita* on the Immoderate Indulgence of the Pleasures of the Palate"<sup>172</sup> is a companion piece to "Edax on Appetite" which it preceded when printed in the *Reflector*. It, too, is addressed to "Mr. Reflector" and is in the form of a letter seeking advice, but its style has no likeness to that of Addison or Steele; it resembles the periodical letters only in the spirit of ridicule in which it is written.

After the publication of the *Essays of Elia*, Lamb again turned to the writing of essays in letter form. His "Letter to an Old Gentleman whose Education has been Neglected" appeared in the *London Magazine*, January, 1825. It was intended as a parody on De Quincey's "Letters to a Young Man whose Education had been Neglected" which appeared in the *London Magazine*, January to July, 1824. Lamb doubtless planned to have his letter (dated April 1, 1823) appear at the same time, but "Taylor and Hessey

<sup>169</sup> *Reflector*, No. 4. *Works*, vol. I, p. 118 f.

<sup>170</sup> *Works*, vol. I, p. 122.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Reflector*, No. 4. *Works*, vol. I, p. 124 f.

would not print it."<sup>173</sup> This letter is of particular interest because it shows how Lamb could alter his style at will, and perfectly imitate another's manner of writing. After several pages of banter, Lamb changes his style to that of Milton in his tractate *Of Education*. He marks the transition by the following paragraph: "And now, my dear Sir, if in describing such a tutor as I have imagined for you, I use a style a little above the familiar one in which I have hitherto chosen to address you, the nature of the subject must be my apology. *Difficile est de scientiis inscienter loqui*, which is as much as to say that 'in treating of scientific matters it is difficult to avoid the use of scientific terms.' But I shall endeavour to be as plain as possible."<sup>174</sup> Lamb closes his letter with a quotation from Milton's tractate.

In 1825 Lamb contributed two humorous letters to *Hone's Every-day Book*. In the first one, addressed to the Editor and signed "Twenty-ninth of February" (vol. 1, May 1, 1825), Lamb writes as if he were the "day," protesting against having been omitted from Hone's *Book* which made no mention of the leap year date. In the second letter, entitled "Twelfth Day of August" (vol. 1, August 12, 1825), he again writes in the same vein under character of the day.<sup>175</sup> These letters are of interest because Lamb had made use of their themes in a previous essay, "Rejoicings upon the New Year's coming of Age" which had appeared in the *London Magazine*, January 1823. In this essay he more than once comments upon the forlorn condition of February twenty-ninth, and represents the Twelfth of August "a jealous old Whig gentlewoman" as disputing with the Twenty-third of April "a new fangled lady of the Tory stamp."

<sup>173</sup> See Lamb's letter to Bernard Barton, March 5, 1823. Lamb wrote Miss Hutchinson (Jan., 1825) that: "De Quincey's Parody was submitted to him before printed, and had his Probatum." (*Works*, vol. I, p. 474 (notes).) In a note which prefaced the "letter" when it was printed in the *London*, Lamb says he is sending "a bantering epistle" which "was suggested by some Letters of your admirable Opium-Eater." It was not, he says, in the remotest degree his intention to ridicule De Quincey's letters. (*Works*, vol. I, p. 213.)

<sup>174</sup> *Works*, vol. I, p. 216.

<sup>175</sup> Its occasion was the birthday of George IV, who was born August 12, 1762, but who adopted St. George's Day, April 23, as his natal day after his accession to the throne.

Other essays, addressed to "Mr. Reflector" are "On the Danger of confounding Moral with Personal Deformity" (*Reflector* No. 2); "On the Custom of Hissing at the Theatres, with some account of a Club of Damned Authors" (*Reflector* No. 3) and "On Burial Societies" (*Reflector* No. 3). These papers exhibit none of the characteristics of the familiar letter, but are essays to which have been appended a salutation and a signature. "On the Custom of Hissing at the Theatres," is based on an actual incident: the failure of Lamb's farce *Mr. H—*, which Lamb recounted in a letter to Manning.<sup>176</sup>

Still another use Lamb made of the letter was to introduce it into the essay, as in "The Old and the New Schoolmaster"<sup>177</sup> (*London Magazine*, May, 1821), where he professes to quote from a letter supplied him by his cousin Bridget.<sup>178</sup>

Lamb's use of the letter in the essay may be summed up as follows: (1) The contents of his own letters, slightly modified, form the material of the essay, as in "The Londoner"; (2) Topics discussed in his personal letters are made the themes of his essays, such as the "Two Races of Men," "The Last Peach" and "The Dissertation upon Roast Pig"; (3) Incidents recounted in his letters are transferred to his essays without change of mood, as for example, "The Ambiguities arising from Proper Names." Also the entire essay is sometimes cast in letter form, and in some instances the letter is introduced into the essay. In these latter practices, Lamb was following the example of the eighteenth century essayists.

Hunt employs the letter-form in his periodicals in a manner similar to that of Steele in the *Tatler*; he adopts the harmless fiction of writing letters to himself as editor. Like Steele he possesses the art of imitating the style and sentiment of his would-be correspondents, but his success in this respect falls short of that achieved by Dr. Johnson. The letters in Hunt's *Tatler* and *Indi-*

<sup>176</sup> *Works*, vol. I, p. 412 (notes). This letter is not dated, therefore it has not been included among those which furnished a theme for the essays.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 49 f.

<sup>178</sup> Lamb is said to have had a hand in "Original Letters of Sir John Falstaff" which were published in 1796; as the work of White. Mr. Lucas believes that the *Dedication* is wholly Lamb's. (See E. V. Lucas, *Life of Lamb*, vol. I, p. 116, 1905.)

cator bear closest resemblance to their eighteenth century prototypes. Like those of the earlier periodicals they frequently voice a complaint, as in "Against Fantastical Scrupleness."<sup>179</sup> which protests against the banishment of old customs, such as hanging the mistletoe. In voicing his protest, Hunt refers to the earlier periodicals: "This brings me to the grievance which caused me to trouble you with so long a letter: for they will mind what you say, because it appears in a *modern* publication; whereas if I quote from the Spectator or Tatler, I am reminded that these are writers whose notions are gone by, that manners have changed as well as fashions, and that it would be as ridiculous to copy the usages of other times, as it would be to appear at the Opera in a wig like Sir Richard Steele's." Also like those of Steele's *Tatler*, some of the letters purport to have been written by young women, who seek advice in affairs of the heart, and various matters of feminine interest. "On Jealousy in Marriage"<sup>180</sup> is from "a fair author," who contrary to the usual practice does not solicit advice, but tells how she followed it. Hunt's sympathy with the problems of the fair sex, in an age when standards for women were undergoing modification is expressed in several *Indicator* letters. In *Indicator* No. 72 under the caption "Old Maids" he writes in defense of spinsterhood, and in the same number expresses a sympathetic attitude toward a broader education for women.

Hunt also employs the fiction of a letter received from a reader, when he reprints stories and other articles to take the place of original matter, which he himself was unable to contribute. For example he prefaces "The Japanese Widow and her Sons,"<sup>181</sup> taken from the *Histoire de Japan*, by P. Charlevoix, with a letter purporting to come from "A Constant Reader," and in like manner introduces "The Englishman in Paris,"<sup>182</sup> a translation from the *Life of Goretry*.

Another likeness to the use of the letter by the *Tatler* and *Spectator* is to be seen in Hunt's adoption of the epistolary form for

<sup>179</sup> *Indicator*, No. 66. (Reference is to original periodical and not to *Indicator* in book form.)

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 60. (See note under cit. 179.)

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 72. (See note under cit. 179.)

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 74. (See note under cit. 179.)

literary and dramatic criticism. He uses it in *Indicator* No. 73 to criticize the French and English drama. The critical essay on "Nautical Poetry,"<sup>183</sup> signed by J. C. H. and probably written by John Hunt, is in the form of a letter. Literary criticism in Hunt's *Tatler* is frequently written in letter form.<sup>184</sup> Essays in epistolary style dealing with fashion and the lesser moralities also appear in Hunt's *Tatler*, as for example "Tests of Respectability."<sup>185</sup>

Hunt made still further use of the letter in his Italian travel sketches which appeared in the *Liberal* as "Letters from Abroad." In the first of the series Hunt explains that he adopted the letter form because he "found the use of one's plural privileges inconvenient in travelling. An author must reverse on these occasions the custom of his legitimate brother *we's* and travel *cognito*; otherwise his personal experiences will sometimes have a very ludicrous and inconsistent effect. He will not be able to move about with so much freedom, or give the results of his impressions with such vivacity, as if he were unhampered with a body corporate."<sup>186</sup> In thus using the letter to record his travel impressions, Hunt was following the example of James Howell, Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Horace Walpole, and others. In some of Hunt's "Letters from Abroad" the familiar tone is further emphasized by personal references. Letter III is addressed to "My dear N" and begins as if written to an actual correspondent: "I write you, as you request, a very long letter 'on the largest sized paper, and in the smallest hand-writing.'"<sup>187</sup> Letter IV, addressed to "Dear C—" also opens in a personal vein: "I hope you have not forgotten the thoughts you entertained of visiting Italy. I set your father longing to accompany you, when I saw him. N's holidays are approaching; and I should like to know what all three of you could do better than to come arm-in-arm, joking and to joke, and see who hungers and thirsts after his old friends."<sup>188</sup> Except for these familiar passages, the "Letters from Abroad" are essays in their

<sup>183</sup> Op. cit.,

<sup>184</sup> *Tatler*, vol. I, pp. 21, 27, 51, 73.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 8.

<sup>186</sup> *Liberal*, vol. 1, p. 97.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 47.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

general tone and style. They are addressed to the impersonal, general reader, and are intended to be read by many instead of one.

"A Walk from Dulwich to Brockham"<sup>180</sup> records Hunt's impressions in "a letter to a friend." The paper is written in an informal entertaining manner, and well illustrates the close connection between the travel sketch, the essay and the letter. In describing the walking trip he took with two companions, Hunt might equally well be writing to an interested friend, or sharing his pleasure, as in this instance, with the wider circle who composed his periodical audience. Descriptions of places and people, anecdotes, recollections and events of historic interest are woven into a charming whole which gives the flavor of the familiar essay in its numerous and happy digressions, and intimate style; and retains the nature of the travel sketch in the information provided, and in the personal impressions, the result of first hand observation. Not only does Hunt describe what he actually sees on his walk, but he links the present with the past, transporting us to the eighteenth century with the magic ease of a wishing carpet.

"A Letter to the Bells of a Parish Church in Italy" contributed by Hunt to the *New Monthly Magazine* in 1825, offers an interesting variation of the familiar essay in letter form. The "letter" is written in this instance not to a supposed correspondent, but to the bells themselves, whom Hunt addresses in a friendly manner.

Hunt's use of the letter form, while not as extensive as Lamb's, clearly shows his indebtedness to the eighteenth century periodical essayists in the manner in which he introduces it to voice complaints, to give advice to the fair sex, and for literary and dramatic criticism. It is not possible to draw parallels between Hunt's personal letters and his essays. There is no transference of material from one to the other as in the case of Lamb. Hunt's personal letters are in fact peculiarly wanting in the intimate charm which characterizes his familiar essays.

Hazlitt's use of the letter form in his familiar essays is very slight compared to that of Hunt and Lamb. He does not vary the form of his essays by introducing into them so-called letters, but in a few instances he begins and ends his essays in letter style.

<sup>180</sup> *Companion*, N. Y. 1845, No. 14. (Bound with the *Indicator*.)



This is however but an editorial device, and no attempt is made to give the material the tone of a familiar letter, implying an audience of one. "On the Love of Country"<sup>190</sup> is addressed "To the Editor of the *Round Table*," but this essay appeared originally in the *Examiner* (November 27, 1814) as one of a series called "Commonplaces," prior to the Round Table essays, and was not therefore addressed to the Round Table Editor, when first written. The germ of "My First Acquaintance with Poets" which appeared in the *Liberal* (No. 3, 1823) is to be found in a letter addressed "to the Editor of the *Examiner*."<sup>191</sup> The letter voices a complaint and is familiar in tone. When taken over into the essay, it did not reappear as a letter, but as an integral part of the essay, from which it is not to be distinguished.

The greatest effect of the letter upon Hazlitt's essays is to be found not in his use of the form, but in the manner in which he weaves the subject matter of letters—quotations from them, and references to them, into his essays. "On Manner"<sup>192</sup> quotes from Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son* (No. cxxx), and takes its theme from Chesterfield's opinion that manner is of more importance than matter. The letters of Horace Walpole are made the subject of a paper by Hazlitt, contributed to the *Edinburgh Review*, December 1818.<sup>193</sup> This essay quotes freely from Walpole's *Letters*, whose author it characterizes as "an inimitable gossip—a most vivacious garrulous historian of fair-haired women, and curious blue china."<sup>194</sup> Hazlitt opens his essay "On Different Sorts of Fame"<sup>195</sup> with a quotation on the futility of posthumous fame from William Melmoth's *Fitzosborne's Letters* (1742-47). He uses the passage as a point of departure for the opposite viewpoint which he develops in his paper. He follows the same method in his essay "On the Literary Character," only instead of quoting directly from letters, in this instance the *Correspondence of Baron Grimm* (1812-14), he quotes from Jeffrey's article on the *Corre-*

<sup>190</sup> *Works*, vol. I, p. 17 f.

<sup>191</sup> *Examiner*, Jan. 12, 1817.

<sup>192</sup> *Works*, vol. I, p. 41 f.

<sup>193</sup> "Letters of Horace Walpole," *Ibid.*, vol. X, p. 159 f.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 93 f.

spondence in the *Edinburgh Review* (July, 1813), and uses his disagreement with Jeffrey's statements as the thesis of his paper. This essay originally appeared in the form of a letter in *The Morning Chronicle* (Oct. 28, 1813), entitled "Baron Grimm and the Edinburgh Reviewers."

Hazlitt also makes telling use of the letter to express his critical and political opinion, and as a weapon of invective, as for example in "A Letter to William Gifford, Esq.,"<sup>196</sup> written to refute Gifford's criticism of the *Round Table*, and his "Free Thoughts on Public Affairs, or Advice to a Patriot, in a Letter Addressed to a Member of the Old Opposition" (1808).<sup>197</sup> Such material, however, lies outside the field of the familiar essay.

In general it may be said that the early nineteenth century familiar essayists further demonstrated the close union between the familiar essay and the familiar letter by: (1) introducing letters into their essays in the manner of the eighteenth century essayists; (2) employing a style in their essays characteristic of the familiar letter; (3) using material from actual letters either as part of their essays, or to furnish a theme for them.

<sup>196</sup> Op. cit., p. 365 f.

<sup>197</sup> Reprinted as "Advice to a Patriot," Ibid., vol. III, p. 1 f.



## **PART II**

### **ROMANTIC ELEMENTS IN THE FAMILIAR ESSAY**



## CHAPTER IV

### INTEREST IN NATURE AND THE PICTURESQUE

One of the strongest influences upon the English familiar essay in the early nineteenth century was that of the Romantic Revival. In the essays of Hunt, Hazlitt and Lamb may be traced Romantic elements which parallel those found in the early nineteenth century poets. The friendship between Lamb and the Lake poets, and Hunt's connection with Byron, Shelley and Keats have often been emphasized. Lamb's friendship with Coleridge, begun at Christ's Hospital where they were fellow-students, continued throughout life, and was a tie so strong that his grief at Coleridge's death is thought to have hastened his own. Coleridge brought Lamb and Southey together when they were both young men, and although the friendship never became an intimate one, their literary correspondence proved an intellectual stimulus to Lamb. As early as 1797 Lamb was with the Wordsworths at Nether Stowey, where he visited Coleridge, and it was after this visit that he commenced work upon *John Woodvil* and *Rosamund Gray*. The latter work, inspired by Mackenzie's *Julia de Roubigné*, is infused with romantic feeling and childlike simplicity, and has been looked upon as Lamb's contribution to the war against convention in which the *Lyrical Ballads* played such a conspicuous part.<sup>1</sup> Hunt's and Keats' residence together has already been noted, as well as Hunt's indebtedness to Keats for suggestions for one of his essays. It was under Hunt's roof that Keats and Shelley became acquainted. The friendship between Hunt and Shelley is one of the most beautiful in literary annals, and it is significant that both Shelley and Keats celebrated Hunt in their poetry. Hazlitt's admiration and friendship for Wordsworth and Coleridge were tempered by political differences, but he freely acknowledged their influence upon his life. It was in Hazlitt's youth that he made the acquaint-

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. by E. V. Lucas, vol. I, p. 389.

ance of Coleridge, and he tells us that he owed it to Coleridge that his understanding "did not remain dumb and brutish," but "at length found a language to express itself."<sup>2</sup> In the same impressionable period he met Wordsworth. He read the *Lyrical Ballads* while they were still in manuscript, and he dates his insight into poetry from the commencement of this acquaintance with Wordsworth and Coleridge.<sup>3</sup> The familiar essayists, and the romantic poets of the early nineteenth century, therefore, were not isolated groups each working under a common influence, but were linked by friendship and bonds of mutual interest.

As critics no less than as familiar essayists, Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt contributed to the Romantic Revival. Their sane and appreciative criticism helped to create a favorable attitude toward the new poetry in the midst of much adverse comment on the part of critics. Their criticism is also valuable as showing their own attitude toward romanticism. Lamb's review of Wordsworth's *Excursion*, which appeared in the *Quarterly Review*, 1814, is not only appreciative in high degree of Wordsworth's genius, but is interpretive of the movement which the *Lyrical Ballads* proclaimed. That Lamb was in sympathy with the pronouncements of the *Preface* to the *Ballads* is evident from his article, but it also shows that he considered Wordsworth's theories needed both interpretation and defense. Hazlitt in his "Lectures on the English Poets" (1818)<sup>4</sup> has freely expressed his opinion of the Lake Poets, upon whom he bestows both praise and censure, the latter colored by political animosity. It is noteworthy that he selects for commendation those qualities which were characteristic likewise of the nineteenth century familiar essay. He admires Wordsworth's poetry because "he furnishes it from his own mind, and is his own subject."<sup>5</sup> He praises the shorter personal compositions of Southey, in which "there is an ironical mixture of the quaint and serious, such as his lines on a picture by Gaspar Poussin, the fine tale of Gauberto, his Description of a Pig, and the Holly-tree, which is an affecting, beautiful and modest retrospect on his own

<sup>2</sup> "My First Acquaintance with Poets," *Works*, Vol. XII, p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> "On Reading Old Books," *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 226.

<sup>4</sup> "Lectures on the English Poets," *Ibid.*, vol. V, p. 143 f.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

character.”<sup>6</sup> He singles out for appreciation Coleridge’s great imaginative and descriptive powers. “His thoughts,” Hazlitt says, “did not seem to come with labour and effort; but as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet.”<sup>7</sup>

Hunt selects for comment the contemplative, retrospective and melancholy aspects of Wordsworth’s poetry. He considers Wordsworth, with the exception of Shakespeare, “the greatest contemplative poet”<sup>8</sup> that England has produced. He finds him “almost entirely a retrospective poet”<sup>9</sup> and remarks that “a vaporous melancholy” hangs over his most beautiful landscapes. He is not in sympathy with either Wordsworth’s melancholy or his didactic tendency, and says if “‘no mirth indeed can be found in his melancholy,’ . . . it is to be feared there is always ‘some melancholy in his mirth.’”<sup>10</sup> Very self-revealing is Hunt’s comment that Wordsworth “seems always girding himself up for his pilgrimage of joy, rather than enjoying it; and his announcements are in a tone too exemplary and didactic. We admire him; we venerate him; we would fain agree with him: but we feel something wanting on his own part towards the largeness and healthiness of other men’s wider experience; and we resent . . . that he should insist upon squaring all which is to come in the interminable future with the visions that bound a college cap.”<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Hunt had the highest admiration for Coleridge as a poet, and considered him “the greatest master of his time,” of pure poetry.<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting to compare the critical attitude of Hunt and Hazlitt toward Shelley. Hunt found Shelley’s poetry “full of mountains, seas, and skies, of light, and darkness, and the seasons, and all the elements of our being, as if Nature herself had written it, with the creation and its hopes newly cast around her.” But

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>8</sup> *The Seer*, Vol. 1, p. 205.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 208-209.

<sup>12</sup> *Imagination and Fancy*, Lond. 1891, p. 250.



he thought it contained "too indiscriminate a mixture of great and small, and a want of sufficient shade,—a certain chaotic brilliancy 'dark with excess of light.'" <sup>13</sup> Hazlitt considered Shelley a genius, and particularly admired his shorter poems. His style, he says, "is to poetry what astrology is to natural science—a passionate dream, a straining after impossibilities, a record of fond conjectures, a confused embodying of vague abstractions,—a fever of the soul, thirsting and craving after what it cannot have, indulging its love of power and novelty at the expense of truth and nature, associating ideas by contraries, and wasting great powers by their application to unattainable objects." <sup>14</sup>

Keats, Hunt says, "never beheld an oak-tree without seeing the dryad." <sup>15</sup> His imagery drawn from Nature particularly appealed to Hunt. "In what other English poet," he asks, . . . "are you so certain of never opening a page without lighting upon the loveliest imagery and the most eloquent expressions?" "His region is 'a wilderness of sweets,'—flowers of all hue, and 'weeds of glorious feature' . . . There . . . is the 'rain-scented eglantine,' and bushes of Mayflowers, with bees and myrtle, and hay,—and endless paths into forests haunted with the loveliest as well as gentlest beings; and the gods live in the distance, amid notes of majestic thunder." <sup>16</sup>

After Gifford's critical attack upon Keats, Hazlitt defended him in *The Spirit of the Age*, and showed his sympathy and regard for "poor Keats." He considered the fault in Keats' poetry was "a deficiency in masculine energy of style." He criticizes *Endymion* for its lack of "hardy spirit or rigid forms of antiquity." Keats, says Hazlitt, "painted his own thoughts and character and did not transport himself into the fabulous and heroic ages." <sup>17</sup> Lamb expresses his admiration for Keats in his review of "St. Agnes' Eve," which he contributed to the *New Times*. Of the romantic poets, he believed Keats next in genius to Wordsworth.

Hazlitt's criticism of Byron in *The Spirit of the Age* is just and

<sup>13</sup> Op. cit., pp. 268-69.

<sup>14</sup> "Shelley's Posthumous Poems," *Works*, Vol. X, p. 256.

<sup>15</sup> "Keats," *Imagination and Fancy*, p. 283.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

<sup>17</sup> "On Effeminacy of Character," *Works*, vol. VI, pp. 254-55.

syllabub.”<sup>97</sup> “Waves,” he thinks, “might be classed, as clouds have been; and more determination given to pictures of them. We ought to have waves and wavelets, billows, fluctuosities, &c., a marble sea, a sea weltering.”<sup>98</sup> As the ship labors in the trough of the waves, the water on either side looks like “a hill of yeast.”<sup>99</sup> Such description conveys but little distinct impression to the reader; it has a bookish tone divorced from real sensations and impressions. The reason is probably to be found in Hunt’s distress of mind during this period. “The sea is a grand sight,” he says, “but it becomes tiresome and melancholy—a great monotonous idea; at least one thinks so, when not happy.”<sup>100</sup>

Hunt’s description of the mountainous country through which he passed on his Italian tour is also curiously lacking in imagination. Hazlitt makes us feel the grandeur, the primeval Force at work in the mountains “lifting earth to heaven.” Hunt describes the Alps, the first mountains he had seen, as having “a fine sulky look, up aloft in the sky,—cold, lofty, and distant.”<sup>101</sup> He says he had imagined that mountains would impress him but little, but upon beholding them, he seemed “to see a picce of one’s book-wonders realized,—something very earthly, yet standing between earth and heaven, like a piece of the antediluvian world looking out of the coldness of ages.”<sup>102</sup> He writes of the Apennines through which he passed on his way to Genoa as “undulating, barren and coarse; without any grandeur but what arises from an excess of that appearance. They lie in a succession of great doughy billows, like so much enormous pudding, or petrified mud.”<sup>103</sup> Of the mountainous country between Florence and Bologna, he observes, . . . “We had proper sloping Apennines, valley and mountain, with fine sweeping meadows of green, interspersed with wood.”<sup>104</sup> When ascending the Alps, and while yet in the darkness before

<sup>97</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 269.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 357.

dawn, he "beheld the top of one of the mountains basking in the sunshine." He does not attempt to describe the glory which he saw, but says "we took it with delighted reverence into our souls."<sup>105</sup> His first sight of Mont Blanc, however, awakens his imagination and fancy. He compares it to "a turret in the sky, amber-coloured, golden, belonging to the wall of some ethereal world."<sup>106</sup> But his description suffers by comparison with that of Hazlitt who says of Mont-Blanc: "It was an image of immensity and eternity. Earth had heaved it from its bosom; the 'vast cerulean' had touched it with its breath. It was a meeting of earth and sky. . . . There is an end here of variety and littleness, and all transitory jarring interests. . . . The mind hovers over mysteries deeper than the abysses at our feet."<sup>107</sup>

In commenting upon Italian cities, Hunt occasionally rises above the commonplace, as when he says: "Antiquity refuses to look ancient in Italy. It insists upon retaining its youthfulness of aspect. The consequence at first is a mixed feeling of admiration and disappointment; for we miss the venerable. The houses seem as if they ought to have sympathized more with humanity, and were as cold and as hard-hearted as their materials. But you discover that Italy is the land, not of the venerable, but the beautiful; and cease to look for old age in the chosen country of the Apollo and the Venus."<sup>108</sup>

If Hunt had no eye for the picturesque in mountains and cities, he observed it in people. A boat passes, and instantly reminds him of Titian, "yet it contained nothing but an old boatman in a red cap, and some women with him in other colours, one of them in a bright yellow petticoat."<sup>109</sup> He describes a religious procession in Pisa, at whose head was "a little live Virgin, about four years old, walking in much state, with a silver-looking crown on her head and a sceptre in her hand."<sup>110</sup> The manner in which Italian women carry themselves recalls to him Dante's simile of his mis-

<sup>105</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 363.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 364.

<sup>107</sup> "Notes of a Journey through France and Italy," *Works*. vol. IX, pp. 291, 292.

<sup>108</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 297.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

tress, walking like a peacock, or a crane, "straight above herself."<sup>111</sup>

Hunt himself gives us the clue to his failure to write more inspiringly of Italy. "To me," he says, "Italy had a certain hard taste in the mouth. Its mountains were too bare, its outlines too sharp, its lanes too stony, its voices too loud, its long summer too dusty. I longed to bathe myself in the grassy balm of my native fields. But I was ill, unhappy . . . and critics, in such condition . . . should give us a list of the infirmities under which they sit down to estimate what they differ with."<sup>112</sup>

In a manner similar to Hazlitt, Hunt decorates his essays with little prose poems of nature. Sometimes they seem to have been suggested by the lines of a poem. In "Spring," one of the *Wishing-Cap Papers*, he opens his essay with a quotation from Gray: "Ah, happy hills! ah, pleasing shade!" and follows it by his own apostrophe to spring: "Hail, beautiful season! hail, return of the green leaves! hail, violets, daisies, and buttercups! hail, blue sky; and ye, white little silver clouds, 'gay creatures of the elements,' the posterity of your turbid sires of winter time!"<sup>113</sup> "Spring and Daisies," one of Hunt's essays in the *Indicator*, to which reference has already been made, contains a passage which may have been suggested by Keats' *Endymion*: "Spring, while we are waiting, is complete. . . . There are clear, crystal mornings; noons of blue sky and white cloud; nights, in which the growing moon seems to lie looking at the stars, like a young shepherdess at her flock. A few days ago she lay gazing in this manner at the solitary evening star, like Diana, on the slope of a valley, looking up at Endymion. His young eye seemed to sparkle out upon the world; while she, bending inwards, her hands behind her head, watched him with an enamored dumbness."<sup>114</sup> Hunt's faults of taste, so apparent in his poetry, are likewise evident in his prose-poetry. In the passages just quoted, "turbid sires of winter time," and "enamored dumbness" are illustrative of his lack of critical acumen.

Hunt again borrows the imagery of poetry in his description of

<sup>111</sup> Op. cit., p. 306.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>113</sup> *Wishing-Cap Papers*, p. 4.

<sup>114</sup> *Indicator*, pt. 1, N. Y., 1845, p. 189.

sun-rise, in his essay "A Now—Descriptive of a Hot Day." "Now the rosy—(and lazy)—fingered Aurora, issuing from her saffron house, calls up the moist vapors to surround her, and goes veiled with them as long as she can; till Phoebus, coming forth in his power, looks everything out of the sky, and holds sharp uninterrupted empire from his throne of beams."<sup>115</sup>

" . . . Poetry without the fit sculpture of verse," Hunt says, "is no more to be called poetry, than beauty conceived is beauty accomplished. . . . But I have the wish to be a poet, and thoughts will arise within me as painful not to express as a lover's. I therefore write memorandums for verse;—thoughts that might perhaps be worthy of putting into that shape, if they could be properly developed;—hints and shadows of something poetical, that have the same relationship to actual poetry as the little unborn spirits that perish by the waters of Lethe have to the souls that visit us, and become immortal."<sup>116</sup> Hunt calls his "memorandums for verse"—"Dreams on the Borders of the Land of Poetry." Two of these are nature descriptions: "Spring and Summer," and "Rain and Sunshine in May," and are less poetic in expression than some of his other writing. He speaks of the rains as "well-tempered" and describes the birds which "come by fives and tens in the meadows," as "agile, . . . springing away with a song." That Hunt's imagery, however much he may have been striving for poetic effect, is not always poetic, may be seen from the following: "I speak of a season when the returning threats of cold, and the resisting warmth of summer-time, make robust mirth in the air; when the winds imitate on a sudden the vehemence of winter; and silver-white clouds are abrupt in their coming-down; and shadows in the grass chase one another, panting, over the fields, like a pursuit of spirits. With undulating necks they pant forward, like hounds or the leopard."<sup>117</sup>

Clouds "abrupt in their coming down" and shadows "panting," belie Hunt's power of observation. He can, however, in a few words, flash upon the mind a picture which creates its own atmos-

<sup>115</sup> Op. cit., pt. 2, p. 17.

<sup>116</sup> "Dreams on the Borders of the Land of Poetry," Leigh Hunt, *Essays (Selected)*, N. Y., 1929, pp. 212, 213 (Everyman edition).

<sup>117</sup> "Rain and Sunshine in May," *Ibid.*, p. 215.

phere, as when he describes his walk home by night through the London suburbs: "How still the trees! How deliciously asleep the country! How beautifully grim and nocturnal this wooded avenue of ascent, against the cold, white sky!"<sup>118</sup> Or when he writes of the oncoming of spring, so that the air seems full of fragrance: "Honey-suckles . . . are detected in blossom: the hazel follows; the snowdrop hangs its white perfection, exquisite with green; we fancy the trees are already thicker; voices of winter birds are taken for new ones; and in February new ones come—the thrush, the chaffinch, and the wood-lark. Then rooks begin to pair; and the wagtail dances in the lane."<sup>119</sup> Such description reminds one of Gilbert White's *Natural Antiquities of Selborne*, a book of which Hunt was very fond.

When he writes of nature and the seasons, his thoughts are often intertwined with personal recollection. The Italian spring suggests the coming of spring in England, and he is seized with longing to see the fields of his homeland, "rich with grass and powdered with flowers." "I am," he says, "in a world of poetry and romance, of vines and olives, and myrtles, . . . of blue mountains and never-ending orchards. . . . What signifies? I think of an English field in a sylvan country, a cottage and oaks in the corner, a path and a stile, and a turf full of daisies."<sup>120</sup> Nature also frequently suggests to Hunt some literary allusion, the recollection of which gives added charm to the scene before him. Writing from Maiano, he says: . . . "The valley which I look upon from my window sparkles in the *Decameron* with a perpetual green. Nature inspires great authors, and they repay her by rescuing her very self from oblivion, and keeping her transitory pictures fresh in our hearts. *They*, thank God, as well as the fields, *are* Nature; and so is every great and kindly aspiration we possess."<sup>121</sup> He had intended, he says, to sprinkle his essay "with some flowers out of the Italian poets," but their observations upon nature "are not true." He prefers "the cockney satisfactions of Chaucer,

<sup>118</sup> "Walks Home by Night," *The Companion*, N. Y., 1845, p. 187. (Bound with the *Indicator*.)

<sup>119</sup> "Fine Days in January and February," *Ibid*, pp. 179-80.

<sup>120</sup> "Spring," *Wishing-Cap Papers*, p. 79.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*.

Spenser, and Milton, who talk of 'merry London,' of lying whole hours looking at the daisies, and of walking out on Sunday mornings to enjoy the daisies and green fields."<sup>122</sup> Perhaps it was nostalgia that caused Hunt to recall so often the beauties of his native land while he was in Italy. The *Wishing-Cap Papers* contain many references to the English country-side, which he contrasts with that of Italy, to the latter's disadvantage. In his essay "Love and the Country," written while in Tuscany, he imagines himself in an English meadow lying among the hay, building castles in the air. "I love to see trees," he says, "that look as if they were good for nothing but to walk under, and to furnish us with a sentiment. . . . I know they do not exist for nothing; and I take them for what they are,—memorandums of the abundance and poetry of Nature."<sup>123</sup>

Hunt, like the Romantic poets, takes the weather and the elements for his theme, and writes of "A Rainy Day," "Mists and Fogs," "Bad Weather," "East Wind," etc. These papers seldom possess imaginative power, such as we find for instance in Shelley when he writes of the elements. They are a blend of realistic detail and fancy. "A Rainy Day" may have been suggested to Hunt by some verses of Swift's, which originally appeared in the *Tatler*. Part of Swift's poem is quoted by Hunt in his essay, together with the introduction given it by "heartly, unenvying Steele." In its realistic detail, Hunt's picture of a rainy day in the city may be compared to that of Swift. Hunt describes the "poor girls with bandboxes" who "trip patiently along, with their wet curls over their eyes, and a weight of skirt,"<sup>124</sup> and Swift writes:

"The tucked-up seamstress walks with hasty strides,  
While streams run down her oiled umbrella's sides."

Hunt introduces a philosophical or moralizing note into his essay by discussing the way to make the best of a bad day. "*Think of something superior to it,*" he says, "make it yield entertaining and useful reflection, as the rain itself brings out the flowers."<sup>125</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>124</sup> *The Seer*, vol. I, p. 158.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., pp. 160-61.

"Mists and Fogs," which originally appeared in the *Indicator* is typical of Hunt's other essays on the elements. Fogs and mists are "clouds unrisen." "The city of London . . . is literally a city in the clouds. Its inhabitants walk through the same airy heaps which at other times float over their heads in the sky, or minister with glorious faces to the setting sun."<sup>126</sup> The essay is largely devoted to literary allusions and quotations from poets who have "done justice," as he expresses it, "to these our melancholy visitors."<sup>127</sup> Homer, Ovid, Apollonius Rhodius, Dante, Spenser, Milton are all drawn upon for illustration.

In his essay "Bad Weather," Hunt creates for the reader the illusion of a cozy, warm interior, in sharp contrast to the winter storm without. After describing the distress caused by such a storm, he draws a picture of the warmth and comfort indoors: "How pleasant is this rug! How bright and generous the fire! How charming the fair makers of the tea!"<sup>128</sup> He devotes more than half of his paper to moralizing. "It is not by grumbling against the elements that evil is to be done away with; but by keeping one's-self in good heart with one's fellow-creatures, and remembering that they are all capable of partaking our pleasures."<sup>129</sup> In the "East Wind" he expresses his oft-repeated belief in the triumph of good over evil. Evil, he thinks, "is in its nature fugitive; and . . . it is the nature of good, when good returns, to outlast it beyond all calculation."<sup>130</sup>

The spirit of reform in these nature essays of Hunt's is another reflection of the Romantic movement. He shared with the poets, notably Shelley, the desire to help men to a better way of life, and in giving voice to this in his essays, he was following the example of the earlier periodical essayists, and was at the same time in the current of contemporary thought.

Hunt had a definite gospel of beauty, which he has made the theme of several of his essays. He desired to bring beauty into the life of everyone, even the poorest, and to make men mindful of beauty in the simplest things. In this he anticipated Ruskin

<sup>126</sup> *Indicator*, pt. I, p. 55.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>128</sup> *The Companion*, p. 175.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>130</sup> *The Seer*, vol. I, p. 166.



and William Morris. He believed that the pleasure to be derived from the world about us is to be found not only in things themselves, but in what they suggest. Thus the more a man knows and the more sensitive he is to beauty, the more pleasurable is his existence. In his essay "On a Pebble," he emphasizes the way in which one thing suggests another, and the consequent enriching of the enjoyment of life. He illustrates the pleasures to be derived from the association of ideas by quoting Wordsworth's lines beginning "A violet by a mossy stone," suggested to Hunt by "sight of a common stone," which also reminds him of the opening lines of Keats' *Hyperion* which contain the phrase "quiet as a stone."<sup>181</sup> In his essay, "Pleasure" he insists that even the poor and struggling man, "when he wants recreation for his thoughts, can make them flow from all the objects, or the ideas of those objects. . . . The commonest goods and chattels are pregnant to him as fairy tales, or things in a pantomime. His hat, like Fortunatus's wishing-cap, carries him into the American solitudes among the beavers, where he sits in thought, looking at them . . . and hearing the majestic whispers in the trees. . . . His coat shall carry him, in ten minutes, through all the scenes of pastoral life and mechanical,—the quiet fields, the sheep-shearing, the feasting, the love-making, the downs of Dorsetshire."<sup>182</sup> Hunt's emphasis is always upon the pleasure to be derived from natural objects, whether actually seen or brought to mind through recollection or through the imaginative pictures of the poet.

He not only urges his fellow-men to draw pleasure from nature, but gives them a great deal of practical advice as to the need of color in everyday living. The English in their "foggy, and too often not very brilliant" country are not fond enough of color, he believes, "not fond enough of a beauty of which Nature herself is evidently very fond, and with which, like all the rest of her beauties, it is the business of civilized man to adorn and improve his own well-being."<sup>183</sup> The Englishman's failure to appreciate color, Hunt attributes to "Puritanism and wars and debts, and the Dutch succession, and false ideas of utility" which "have all

<sup>181</sup> Op. cit., pp. 23-24.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>183</sup> "Color," Ibid., p. 34.

conspired to take gladness out of our eyesight, as well as jollity out of our pockets." <sup>184</sup> He finds a moral as well as material beauty in color,—“an inherent gladness,—an intention on the part of Nature to share with us a pleasure felt by herself—Colors are the smiles of Nature.” <sup>185</sup> Like Hazlitt, Hunt at times parallels Wordsworth in thought, and further accentuates the likeness of ideas by quoting from his poetry. Wordsworth's lines beginning “My heart leaps up” furnish the theme for the following comment: “The rainbow reads its beauteous lecture in the clouds, showing the sweet division of the hues; and the mechanical ‘philosopher,’ as he calls himself, smiles with an air of superiority, and thinks he knows all about it, because the division is made. The little child, like the real philosopher, *knows more*; for his ‘heart leaps up,’ and he acknowledges a glad mystery. He feels the immensity of what he does *not* know.” <sup>186</sup> Hunt reveals a transcendental belief in the intuitive faculty of the mind when he says: “Beyond the dry line of knowledge lies beauty, and all which is beautiful in hope, and exalting in imagination.” <sup>187</sup>

He further sets forth his gospel of beauty under such an apparently commonplace title as “Windows,” <sup>188</sup> the theme of two of his essays. After making a plea for more beautiful windows in the home, he falls into a contemplative mood. The raindrops on the window pane suggest to him “a world of beauty and mystery and aboriginal idea, bringing . . . a thousand images of proportion and reflection, and the elements, and light and color, and roundness and delicacy and fluency, and beneficence, and the refreshed flowers, and the growing corn, and dewdrops on the bushes, and the tears that fall from gentle eyes, and the ocean, and the rainbow, and the origin of all things.” <sup>189</sup> Both of these essays are a mixture of matter-of-fact commonplaces, and imaginative perception. Hunt seems to be illustrating his own theory that “matter of fact, and spirit of fact, must both be appreciated,

<sup>184</sup> Op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> “Windows,” and “Windows Considered from the Inside,” Ibid., pp. 38 ff. and 48 ff.

<sup>189</sup> “Windows Considered from the Inside,” Ibid., pp. 51-52.

in order to do justice to the riches of Nature"; by which he would distinguish between the senses and the imagination. Not to perceive both the matter of fact, and spirit of fact, is, Hunt believes, "to be a poor unattended creature, who walks about in the world, conscious of nothing but himself."<sup>140</sup>

Closely related to the romantic treatment of nature is the romantic interest with which places are invested. This is to be seen particularly in the familiar essayists' treatment of London life; in their return to the past, which they invest with imaginative fancy, and in the impassioned recollection of events, in their childhood and youth, connected with well-loved places and scenes. Hunt wrote at greater length of London life than either Lamb or Hazlitt. Therefore his papers will be considered first.

In his liking for the city where he spent most of his life, Hunt was a true Cockney. He shares with Lamb the love of London's sights and sounds, her shops and odd characters. Added to his liking for London, was his interest in people, especially those figures of London's past, which he calls forth in imagination to people her houses and streets. A familiar, gossipy style, an excellent memory for anecdotes, an interest in the history of ancestral houses and their owners, combine in Hunt to create a type of sketch of London life which if not entirely new, was lent a liveliness and grace which it had hitherto lacked. In these sketches, he skillfully weaves history, biography, antiquarian lore, anecdote and incident into a pleasing and entertaining narrative. The whole is given color and additional interest by the author's reflections and comments, which lend a familiar character to his sketches. The numerous digressions, the easy conversational style, the author's evident pleasure in his subject, which he invests with his own personality, entitle these sketches to be included in a study of the familiar essay.

Hunt's essay, "Pleasant Memories connected with Various Parts of the Metropolis" which appeared in the *Indicator*, is a forerunner of his more extended sketches—*The Town* (1848), *The Old Court Suburb* (1855) and *A Saunter through the West End of London* (1861). Early in this essay in the *Indicator*, Hunt remarks that "one of the best secrets of enjoyment is the art of cultivating

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<sup>140</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 56.

pleasant associations," and it might be said that the art of this type of essay is the association of famous Londoners with various places in the metropolis, "pleasant associations," indeed, under Hunt's skillful guidance. In peopling London with great literary figures from Chaucer to Richardson, Hunt writes in the pleasant, entertaining manner of one who would share his own enjoyable associations with the reader. The sketch is comparatively brief and in its central idea only, is it suggestive of the travel sketches which Hunt later developed, described by Mr. Monkhouse as "gossip historical and topographical."<sup>141</sup>

Two papers contributed by Hunt to the *Indicator* take for their theme the shops of London.<sup>142</sup> "Though we are such lovers of country," says Hunt, "we can admire London in some points of view; and among others, from the entertainment to be derived from its shops."<sup>143</sup> He tests his liking for shops by the manner in which he can associate their contents with a pleasant train of ideas. He thinks a glass-shop a beautiful place, for it reminds him of the splendors of a fairy palace; a tavern and coffee-house "is a pleasant sight from its sociability; not to mention the illustrious club memories of the times of Shakespeare and the Tatlers";<sup>144</sup> but of all shops a print-seller's pleases him most, for there he can see fine engravings, "translations from Titian and Raphael."

In "A Nearer View of Some of the Shops" Hunt describes a toy shop which recalls to him memories of his boyhood: "We still seem to have a lively sense of the smell of that gorgeous red paint, which was on the handle of our first wooden sword! The pewter guard also—how beautifully fretted and like silver did it look! How did we hang it round our shoulder by the proud belt of an old ribbon;—then feel it well suspended; then draw it out of the sheath, eager to cut down four savage men for ill using ditto of damsels!"<sup>145</sup> The sculptor's shop with its plaster casts awakens memories of the holiday spent in his boyhood in the gallery of the

<sup>141</sup> W. C. Monkhouse, *Life of Leigh Hunt*, p. 175.

<sup>142</sup> "On the Sight of Shops," *Indicator*, pt. I, p. 222 f., and "A Nearer View of Some of the Shops," *Indicator*, pt. I, p. 230 f.

<sup>143</sup> "On the Sight of Shops," *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>144</sup> "A Nearer View of Some of the Shops," *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

painter, Benjamin West. It was to West's house with its art gallery that Hunt says he owes the greatest part of his love "for what is Italian and belongs to the fine arts."<sup>146</sup> Hunt's description of the fruitier's window in this essay, in its feeling for color and form, may be likened, in lesser degree, to Keats' power to summon forth sensuous images. In these essays there is a blend of realistic and imaginative elements that is truly delightful, because of the manner in which Hunt interrupts his narrative of things seen to indulge in fanciful speculation or to recall memories of his youth.

Under the caption "Wishing-Cap Papers,"<sup>147</sup> Hunt contributed several essays on London to the *Examiner* in the years 1824-25. He wrote these articles while at Maiano, and they may have helped to lessen the nostalgia which he felt for London. "The title," Hunt tells us in his *Autobiography*, "was very genuine. When I put on my cap, and pitched myself in imagination into the thick of Covent Garden, the pleasure I received was so vivid,—I turned the corner of a street so much in the ordinary course of things, and was so tangibly present to the pavement, the shop-windows, and the people, and a thousand agreeable recollections which looked me naturally in the face,—that sometimes when I walk there now, the impression seems hardly more real. I used to feel as if I actually pitched my soul there, and that spiritual eyes might have seen it shot over from Tuscany, into York Street, like a rocket."<sup>148</sup> The persons and places mentioned in these London sketches were afterwards more fully described in *The Town*, but the "Wishing-Cap Papers" have more of the personal element, and more gusto than the later sketches.

Hunt begins "A Walk in Covent Garden" with traversing Maiden Lane, which he likes for three reasons: because he has walked there a thousand times; for its book-stalls and picture-shops; and for the visions it calls forth of Voltaire, Congreve and other wits. He peoples Covent Garden with familiar eighteenth century figures: Addison, Steele, Dryden, Garth, Colonel Brett, Mrs. Bracegirdle, etc. The character of all this neighborhood he considers "essentially gay and social, scented with snuff-boxes, and

<sup>146</sup> Op. cit., p. 237.

<sup>147</sup> Reprinted in book form, 1873.

<sup>148</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 334.

rustling with hoop petticoats.”<sup>149</sup> In true wishing-cap fashion he passes from the eighteenth century into the nineteenth with a recollection of Charles Lamb and his Thursday evening parties in Russell Street. “What would I not give for another Thursday evening? It was humanity’s triumph; for whist-players and no whist-players there for the first time met together.”<sup>150</sup>

In “Piccadilly and the West End” Hunt again indulges in personal recollection in recalling evenings spent with the Novellos in Oxford Street, where Charles Lamb came to “wonder at our quaint spirits.” In this paper as in the former one, Hunt follows the plan of peopling the squares and streets with illustrious Londoners who lived there in the eighteenth century. He continually breaks his narrative for the purpose of personal comment, or self-revelation. The informal tone of his description may be seen from the following: “The West End may be supposed to commence at Leicester Square. It is but a mongrel square, a mixture of house and shop; but it is green in the middle, and contains a statue of some prince. There are people who object to these royal statues, thinking it a pity that they are not rather those of some great philosophers, poets, or other public benefactors. But when they reflect that the faces are too far off to be seen, and that few persons know who they are, the objection perhaps will vanish.”<sup>151</sup>

“A Walk in the City” takes the reader over “the most classical ground in the metropolis,” to the haunts of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Pope and Gray. Hunt makes no attempt to follow his theme in any systematic fashion. His Wishing Cap makes it possible for him, not only as he claims, to see the whole neighborhood and what is going on in every house, but to slip easily back and forth from century to century, with a rapidity as amazing as it is sudden. His preference is for crowded city streets, or old alleys, “from Pudding Lane to Pie Corner.” He will have none of a suburban street, which is “neither town nor country—neither City nor West End.” “I must have,” he says, “either antiquity to remind me of the past generations, or something busy and going on to warm my heart with the present.”<sup>152</sup> He again takes

<sup>149</sup> “A Walk in Covent Garden,” *Wishing-Cap Papers*, p. 25.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>151</sup> “Piccadilly and the West End,” *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>152</sup> “A Walk in the City,” *Ibid.*, p. 47.

the reader into his confidence when he confesses: " 'For my own private eating,' I would rather have been a citizen of the age of Elizabeth, my cheeks glowing not only with beef and pudding, but with fresh air and a hundred merry games; but, nevertheless, my content to be a sick author in the nineteenth century 'hath a preferment in it.' " <sup>153</sup> Austin Friars recalls to Hunt his boyhood visits to the Thornton family. "To this house with its music and its kindness," he says, "I attribute much of the coloring of my after-life." <sup>154</sup>

In "Whitehall," another Wishing-Cap paper, Hunt says that what he relates has no pretensions to the notice of the antiquary: "My antiquities are all out of Pennant, with the exception of what I glean here and there from the wits and poets. The only value in my picture (if any) is in the coloring, and in the figures occasionally introduced." <sup>155</sup> This essay contains less digression and self-revelation than the papers just mentioned. Whitehall is pictured in the time of Queen Elizabeth, Henry VIII, and the two Charles. The banqueting-house, built by Inigo Jones, particularly interested Hunt, who says that its beautiful proportions affect him like a piece of music. <sup>156</sup>

The Wishing-Cap paper, "St. James Park" is interesting for its literary allusions, for the verses quoted from Waller, describing the Park in the reign of Charles II, and for the manner in which Pennant is drawn upon for anecdote and comment. To their many literary references, and to the natural and apt manner in which these allusions are introduced, Hunt's travel sketches owe part of their charm. He recalls, for example, the meeting of Bickerstaff with his friend, the upholsterer, in St. James Park, and recollects that the hero in Fielding's *Amelia* used to walk in the Mall. Painting and sculpture interested Hunt, and he frequently comments upon the works of art which adorn the buildings he describes. Music also claimed his attention; he notes that the band on parade play the best pieces of Mozart and Haydn, and that he "took home

<sup>153</sup> Op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., pp. 50-51.

<sup>155</sup> "Whitehall," Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

to school" the air of *non più andrai* long before he knew the name of Mozart.

In 1828 Hunt contributed to his *Companion*, "A Walk from Dulwich to Brockham," written in his most familiar vein. The many digressions and lively comments he makes as he proceeds upon his journey indicate what a delightful walking companion he must have been. He records a most interesting conversation he had at Streatham with an old man who had known Dr. Johnson, and who described his manner and his walk. "The traveller," comments Hunt, "may be in some measure regarded as a representative of wandering humanity. He claims relationship with all whom he finds attached to a place in idea."<sup>157</sup> This friendly "relationship" of Hunt to all that interests him in people and places is one of the secrets of the charm of his travel essays. The warm, human, personal element is seldom, if ever, wanting. His love of nature, and imaginative fancy find expression in this essay in the description of a bed of poppies: "It looked like a bed for Proserpina—a glow of melancholy beauty, containing a joy perhaps beyond joy. Poppies with their dark ruby cups and crowned heads, the more than wine color of their sleepy silk, and the funeral look of their anthers, seem to have a meaning about them beyond other flowers. They look as if they held a mystery at their hearts, like sleeping kings of Lethe."<sup>158</sup>

In "A Journey by Coach" originally contributed to *Leigh Hunt's London Journal*,<sup>159</sup> he describes a coaching trip from the White Horse in Piccadilly to Stratford-upon-Avon. "A journey by coach," he says, "cannot be expected to furnish as much as one on foot and at leisure, but we have seen some interesting places, and had recollections awaked up from our books, and we here propose to carry something like one of our London supplements into the country."<sup>160</sup> In the first paper of the series, he describes the inside of the coach, for, he says, he has never seen a description of the *inside*. He humorously sketches the coachman, who "gathers

<sup>157</sup> *The Companion*, p. 242.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, vol. II, Nos. 85, 86, 87, 89 (Nov. 14, 21, 28; Dec. 12, 1835).

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 85.



the reins in his hands with a sort of half-gentility—a certain reticence and composure of bearing; and gives answers in the style of a man who is not to be too much troubled.”<sup>161</sup> Hunt’s own pleasure in the journey is communicated to the reader with a gusto and holiday spirit with which all journeys should begin. “To be borne along,” says Hunt, with no trouble, and yet without compulsion or mere passiveness, and with a sense of the power of commanding what you enjoy, is surely a pleasurable state of being both for body and mind.”<sup>162</sup>

In the second paper of the “Journey” Hunt jokingly continues the fiction of a coaching tour: “The leisure and riches of your paper-traveller are immense. He cares not at how many places he puts up, provided they are agreeable. Noblemen’s mansions fly open to him, and the portals of old time. For him, all the steam-carriages in England shall stop at a moment’s notice; and even the headlong equipages of royalty wait, till he has taken notice of the princes inside.”<sup>163</sup> This paper contains an appreciation of Mrs. Inchbald, whose work *Nature and Art* Hunt acknowledges, definitely influenced his opinions.

The third essay of the series is less full of personal digression, being confined largely to comment upon famous houses and places seen along the way. Holland House, Hammersmith, Turnham Green, Sion House and Osterley Park are brought to the reader’s attention by means of historic incident, legends, anecdotes, and literary allusions.

The fourth and last paper of the series opens with sympathetic reflections upon coach-horses, followed by comments upon Hounslow Heath and the neighboring district. Hunt’s interest in this part of the journey is owing to the Heath having been the scene of robberies and stage holdups in the eighteenth century, and to its association with famous writers from Chaucer to Cowley. He planned to continue his “Journey” but it was brought abruptly to a close by the cessation of his *Journal*.

The idea for Hunt’s more extended sketches of London, *The*

<sup>161</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> *Leigh Hunt’s London Journal*, vol. II, No. 86.

*Town, The Old Court Suburb, and A Saunter Through the West End of London*, those agreeable "melanges of history, literature and topography," was not original with him. His interest in such sketches is shown in a letter to his friend, John Watson Dalby, written in 1834, in which he mentions not only Dalby's own contributions to this field, but those of other writers. In speaking of Dalby's work Hunt furnishes a very good description of this kind of travel writing. "I hope," he writes Dalby, "you will ramble and peregrinate on paper till your readers tell you to stop; which they will be in no hurry to do, if they are of my mind; for an enjoyment of localities, after that fashion, combines the novelty of the particular portrait with the expression of feelings common and delightful to all, . . . and I know very few kinds of writing indeed that are more desirable, especially with that mixture of verse and prose which you have adopted."<sup>164</sup> Hunt mentions earlier writings of this type, among them the *Iter Boreale* of Bishop Corbett, Gay's *Epistles*, and Prior's *Down Hall*. "But," he continues, "new journeys are the thing; nor is it necessary to go far. The great point is to enjoy, and to feel oneself in the arms of nature and one's 'inn,' and to give way to the impulses."<sup>165</sup>

In 1835 Hunt contributed to the Supplement of *Leigh Hunt's London Journal* a series of papers, under the title of "The Streets of London" which later appeared in book form as *The Town*. The "Advertisement" to *The Town* calls it "an account of London, partly topographical and historical, but chiefly recalling the memories of remarkable characters and events associated with its streets between St. Paul's and St. James'." In his Introduction, Hunt makes it clear that he intends to write of the past as well as the present. "The past," he says, "is the heirloom of the world," and nowhere he believes is it more traceable than in London, where it is visibly present in old buildings, and in the names of streets. Hunt begins his account of London with the ancient Britons and brings it down to his own day. *The Town* is an agreeable mixture of antiquarianism, history, biography, anecdotes, reminiscences, theatrical criticism, and personal comment interspersed with

<sup>164</sup> *Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, vol. I, p. 286.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

quotations from verse and prose. Hunt's thoroughness in informing himself concerning the region he is describing may be seen from his numerous citations of authorities. *The Town* is a kind of glorified guide book, giving colorful pictures of "all that rich aggregate" of London's past.

Aside from its historical and topographical features, *The Town* gains additional interest from Hunt's personal reflections, which frequently interrupt the narrative. It is these comments that largely determine the essay-like nature of the work. "Merry London," for example, causes him to think of the days of Chaucer and healthy living, which in turn leads him to reflect: "Of all pleasures, those are the cheapest which are bought of nature—such as air and exercise, and manly sports; and though we allow that the poor, in order to relish them, must be free from the melancholier states of poverty, it is desirable *meanwhile* that the dispensers of knowledge should assist in hastening more cheerful times by preparing for them, and that all classes should be told how much the cultivation of their bodily health increases the ability, both of rich and poor, to get out of their troubles."<sup>166</sup> The trees in London's streets become the theme of an essay-in-little on the effect of nature upon the individual. Trees and flowers "refresh the common-places of life, shed a harmony through the busy discord, and appeal to those first sources of emotion, which are associated with all that is young and innocent."<sup>167</sup> The book-sellers of St. Paul's remind Hunt of Newberry, the famous seller of juvenile books, and bring to mind recollections of his childhood reading of "certain little penny books, radiant with gold and rich with bad pictures."<sup>168</sup> The reader delays his tour of St. Paul's while Hunt talks about reading for children.

*The Old Court Suburb* originally ran in Dickens' *Household Words* in serial form from August, 1853, to February, 1854. Hunt was sixty-nine years old when he began to write these sketches, and they have a mellow and genial flavor, characteristic of his later years. In writing of Kensington, Hunt was on familiar ground, for he made his home there from 1840 until about the

<sup>166</sup> *The Town; its Memorable Characters and Events*, Lond., 1889, p. 20.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

middle of 1853. From his *Correspondence* we get some idea of how much work these papers entailed. The many references had to be carefully checked, and frequently the material needed was not available. The easy style and many digressions of Hunt's travel sketches tend to make his performance seem an easy one, but a wealth of labor went into the making of this pleasant "gossip." Whenever possible, he tried to visit the great houses of which he writes, but ill-health prevented him from visiting Kensington Palace, which he describes without ever having seen its interior. Although Hunt occasionally leaned heavily upon the works of others for his factual material, he lends a freshness and individuality to his work by reason of his personality and his genius for "the right association in the right place."

Hunt early conveys to the reader the friendly and informal manner in which he intends to present his information about the "Old Court Suburb." "We shall suppose that the reader is our companion; that we are giving him what information we possess in return for the pleasure of his society; and that we say neither more nor less on any one of the objects, than might naturally be said between friends actually walking together, and equally alive to the only real interest of the subject, that is to say, of human interest."<sup>100</sup> It is the "human" interest which Hunt succeeds in creating that adds so much to the pleasure in reading this work. He centers the story of Kensington about its great houses: Gore, Colby, Kensington, Scarsdale, Shaftesbury, Holland, and Kensington Palace. Six chapters are devoted to Holland House, and an equal number to Kensington Palace and its gardens. The great families who have lived in these houses, their furnishings, their art treasures and their gardens chiefly occupy his attention. He does not adorn his narrative with as numerous poetic quotations as in *The Town*, but he is no less digressive. Essays-in-little are frequently introduced on any subject which happens to associate itself in his mind with the material about which he is writing. In the midst of describing Gore House, he devotes several pages to "the cultivation of the Beautiful"; the parish church and churchyard in High Street leads to a somewhat extended reflection on

<sup>100</sup> *The Old Court Suburb, or Memorials of Kensington, Regal, Critical and Anecdotal*, Phila., n.d., vol. 1, pp. 4-5.

churchyards in thoroughfares, and the custom of placing flowers on graves.

*The Old Court Suburb* contains many thumb nail sketches of well-known people of Kensington. Some of the most interesting of these "lives" are of people whose graves are in the High Street Churchyard. Hunt begins each sketch in the same manner, by naming the person, the year in which he died, and his age. The result is a kind of prose *Spoon-River Anthology*, without its irony. In this work Hunt expresses his optimistic faith in a new and better society, his belief in the beautiful, and his credo of cheerfulness and healthful living. He ends his sketch with a quotation from Evelyn's "Garden" essay, an appropriate ending to a work which devotes so much attention to gardens.

*A Saunter Through the West End* contributed by Hunt to the *Atlas* newspaper as a serial in 1847, was published in book form in 1861. It shows the same characteristics as *The Town* and *The Old Court Suburb*, and is written in the informal, conversational manner which gives to his familiar essays such genial warmth and charm. In the opening pages of *A Saunter Through the West End* he states his plan is "to go with the reader through the streets of the West End, as if the writer and he were actually so doing; that is to say as if they were lovers of local associations walking along the pavement at their leisure, and noticing any topic of interest which presented itself new or old."<sup>170</sup> Hunt keeps up such a lively comment on people and places that the reader's interest never flags. A large portion of the book is devoted to brief sketches and anecdotes of literary people, and of singers, dancers, and actors who in by-gone days graced the stages of the Opera House and the Haymarket Theatre. Among the writers commented upon are Madame d'Arblay, Evelyn, Dr. Arbuthnot, Mrs. Inchbald, Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Horace Walpole and Addison. The author's liking for the eighteenth century is strongly reflected in this work in the zest he shows in reconstructing the period of Queen Anne and her successors.

Hunt also includes contemporary London in his picture, and particularly interesting are his reminiscences of Hazlitt and Lamb. He recalls that "Hazlitt was as fond of tea as Dr. Johnson; and

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<sup>170</sup> *A Saunter through the West End*, Lond., 1861, p. 2.

if he did not say as many bon mots over it, he delivered better criticisms, and has equal rights to have his tea recorded."<sup>171</sup> We see Lamb strolling up Wardour Street on a summer's day, choosing from a book stall one of his favorite authors, "the only flowers he much cared for." "He had," says Hunt, "no predilection for modern editions of his favourite writers, furnished with notes, and costing large sums of money. . . . His bookshelves accordingly had no outward attractions. They resembled an old fruitier's who makes no show. Dust and dry leaves hung about them. But within were melting peaches, and fruit for the gods."<sup>172</sup> On the contrary, Hazlitt "had scarcely a book in his house."<sup>173</sup>

Hunt's reforming spirit causes him to interrupt his *Saunter* from time to time, in order to comment on some matter which he believes indicates progress. His social outlook is always cheerful and optimistic. "At all events," he says, "advance society must; and in what better spirit can it advance, than in that of recognizing all true things for what they are, the ornamental as well as the useful, and doing its best to confirm and partake them?"<sup>174</sup> In another place he alludes to his belief in the coming recognition of the brotherhood of man. "A new note," he believes, "has been struck in the ears of the world, to which the wisest both among rich and poor are lending their attention; and St. James and St. Giles will yet come to know the relationship which all human beings bear to one another."<sup>175</sup> Hunt, like Addison and Steele, is trying to reform the "town," but his sympathies are wider in their range, and his social vision is a broader one, reflecting as it does, the ideals of the nineteenth century.

In these more extended travel sketches of Hunt's the same characteristics are discernible: lively comment upon people and things, which serves to recreate the past, as well as to present vividly the London of his own day; a genius for seizing upon significant details which lend color and interest to the narrative; a painstaking care in the accurate presentation of facts; an informal, conversa-

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<sup>171</sup> Op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., pp. 48-49.

tional style admirably adapted to the subject matter; numerous digressions which reveal the personality and opinion of the writer; and frequent quotations from the work of other authors. In these sketches, Hunt does not, like Lamb, deserve to be called the prose-poet of London, but he leaves a memorial of his affection for the "town" which time will not dull. His attitude toward society, his healthy optimism, and his pleasure in natural beauty may be definitely referred to the nineteenth century.

Before turning to Lamb's essays which have to do with London life, it is worth while to review his attitude toward nature, for his essays contain no such romantic appreciation of natural beauty as characterizes the writing of Hunt and Hazlitt. If we were to take too seriously some of Lamb's comments on natural scenery, we might conclude he was a true Cockney, wedded to his native London with no predilection for the beauties of nature. He writes to his friend Manning (Nov. 28, 1800): "I must confess that I am not romance-bit about Nature." And in a letter to Wordsworth, about the same time, he says, "I don't much care if I never see a mountain in my life. I have passed all my days in London, until I have found as many and intense local attachments as any of your mountaineers can have done with dead Nature. . . . I have no passion (or have had none since I was in love, and then it was the spurious engendering of poetry and books) for groves and valleys. . . . Your sun, and moon, and skies, and hills, and lakes, affect me no more, or scarcely come to me in more venerable characters, than as a gilded room with tapestry and tapers, where I might live with handsome visible objects."<sup>176</sup> It is only necessary to recall Lamb's love of exaggeration, and his sense of humor, in order to imagine his wry smile as he wrote to Wordsworth about "dead Nature." In contrast to this, we have his declaration: "I am in love with this green earth; the face of town and country; the unspeakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets."<sup>177</sup> In August, 1802, Lamb visited Coleridge at Keswick, climbed to the top of Skiddaw, and waded up the bed of Lodore. "I have satisfied myself," he says, "that there is such a thing as

<sup>176</sup> Letter to Wordsworth, Jan. 30, 1801, *Life, Letters and Writings of Charles Lamb*, ed. by Percy Fitzgerald, vol. II, pp. 69-71.

<sup>177</sup> "New Year's Eve," *Works*, vol. II, p. 29.

that which tourists call *romantic*, which I very much suspected before." <sup>178</sup>

In his review of Wordsworth's *Excursion*, Lamb attributes the prevailing charm of the poem to the fact "that the dialogue throughout is carried on in the very heart of the most romantic scenery which the poet's native hills could supply." "We breathe in the fresh air," he says, "as we do while reading Walton's *Complete Angler*." Moreover Lamb recognized the deeper implication in Wordsworth's love of nature: "To a mind constituted like that of Mr. Wordsworth, the stream, the torrent, and the stirring leaf—seem not merely to suggest associations of deity, but to be a kind of speaking communication with it." <sup>179</sup> But notwithstanding Lamb's appreciation of the romantic in nature, it did not attract him as a theme for his own essays. Nowhere does he write in praise of natural beauty in lyrical outbursts, such as we find in Hazlitt. It is the city, with its myriad and teeming life, its odd characters, its shops and its sights and sounds which is Lamb's land of romance. To it, he transfers the romantic charm usually associated with descriptions of nature, and in consequence he has been aptly termed the prose poet of London. Lamb was charmed by the manifestations of city life, as the romantic poet is by the natural beauties he sees about him. In several of his letters to Wordsworth, already referred to, Lamb expresses his love of the city, and makes it the theme of his essay, *The Londoner*.

Like Hazlitt, Lamb was a keen observer; he was able to reproduce his impressions with great fidelity, and to recreate the atmosphere of a place. His preference is for those places and things which have the charm of antiquity, and for those oddities in people which before him, Hogarth, and after him Dickens, so well delineated. Lamb is especially happy in his description of old buildings. Paradoxically, he knew how to make the ancient come to life and burgeon under his pen. He is the poet of bricks and stones and mortar, as Wordsworth is the poet of nature. Each after his own fashion animates what he describes. As we are made to feel a soul invests natural objects, so old buildings too

<sup>178</sup> E. V. Lucas, *Life of Charles Lamb*, vol. I, p. 279.

<sup>179</sup> "Review of 'The Excursion'," *Works*, vol. I, p. 162.



have an individuality, a personality, which is the sum and substance of the life which has inhabited them.

The romantic impulse has been defined "as an attitude of mind, a spirit given, a passion for modification, ornamentation, and re-creation of material in terms of a self-originated ideal, and not a mood dictated by experience and faithfulness to material."<sup>180</sup> In this sense Lamb is highly romantic. He takes ordinary material and invests it with imaginative charm. His is not "a return to the past" in the sense of medievalism, but a return to the past in the flavor and spirit with which he invests objects, so that they seem to be the reincarnation of the past. We might well exclaim with him: "Antiquity! thou wondrous charm, what art thou? that, being nothing, art everything! The mighty future is nothing, being every thing. The past is every thing, being nothing!"<sup>181</sup> The romantic glamor of antiquity hangs over the South-Sea House which Lamb describes as "melancholy-looking" with "a desolation something like Balclutha's."<sup>182</sup> Its soul has long since fled. It is "a magnificent relic!" "Time . . . has not freshened it. No wind has resuscitated the face of the sleeping waters. . . . Silence and destitution are upon thy walls, proud house, for a memorial!"<sup>183</sup> The effect is heightened by Lamb's describing his own sensations: "To such as me, old house! there is a charm in thy quiet:—a cessation—a coolness from business—an indolence almost cloistral—which is delightful! With what reverence have I paced thy great bare rooms and courts at eventide!"<sup>184</sup> The atmosphere of antiquity is again created in his description of the Inner Temple where he was born and passed the first seven years of his life. He calls it "the most elegant place in the Metropolis," and pictures its "magnificent ample squares" and classic green recesses, its collegiate aspect, its terrace, its fountains and its sun-dials. Its sun-dials are the subject of a prose-poem by Lamb which weaves the

<sup>180</sup> W. D. MacClintock. *Some Paradoxes of the English Romantic Movement of the Eighteenth Century*. Univ. of Chicago Decennial Publications, First Series, vol. VII, Chicago, 1903, p. 346.

<sup>181</sup> "Oxford in the Vacation," *Works*, vol. II, p. 9.

<sup>182</sup> "The South-Sea House," *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

spell of the past: "What an antique air had the now almost effaced sun-dials, with their moral inscriptions, seeming coevals with that Time which they measured, and to take their revelations of its flight immediately from heaven, holding correspondence with the fountain of light! How would the dark line steal imperceptibly on, watched by the eye of childhood, eager to detect its movement, never caught, nice as an evanescent cloud, or the first arrests of sleep! . . . It was the primitive clock, the horologe of the first world. Adam could scarce have missed it in Paradise. It was the measure appropriate for sweet plants and flowers to spring by, for the birds to apportion their silver warblings by, for flocks to pasture and be led to fold by. The shepherd 'carved it out quaintly in the sun'; and, turning philosopher by the very occupation, provided it with mottos more touching than tombstones."<sup>185</sup>

Lamb, like Addison, writes upon the tombs in Westminster Abbey.<sup>186</sup> The essay shows his heartfelt appreciation of the genius of place and his love for the past. "Is the being shown over a place the same as silently for ourselves detecting the genius of it?" And again he questions: "Did you ever see or hear of a mob in the Abbey while it was free to all? Do the rabble come there, or trouble their heads about such speculations? . . . They have, alas! no passion for antiquities. . . . If they had, they would be no longer the rabble."<sup>187</sup>

Lamb, in his sketches of figures common to London street life, employs a theme which had occupied the pens of Steele,<sup>188</sup> Swift and Goldsmith. Swift in the *Tatler* (No. 9, April 30, 1709) draws in verse a realistic picture of London in the early morning, his object being, he says, to make "the incidents just as they really appear." Goldsmith in his "Adventures of a Strolling Player" writes of the beggar and praises the freedom of his life. "We beggars," he says, "are the very fondlings of Nature. . . . The whole creation is filled with good things for the beggar. . . . Joy, joy, my blood! though our estates lie nowhere, we have fortunes wherever we go. If an inundation sweeps away half the grounds

<sup>185</sup> "Old Benchers of the Inner Temple," *Works*, vol. II, p. 83.

<sup>186</sup> "The Tombs in the Abbey," *Ibid.*, p. 207 ff.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>188</sup> *Spectator*, No. 430, July 14, 1712.

of Cornwall, I am content—I have no lands there; if the stocks sink, that gives me no uneasiness—I am no Jew.”<sup>189</sup> Lamb in his “Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis” voices the same idea with regard to the beggar's freedom: “The ups and downs of the world concern him no longer. He alone continueth in one stay. The price of stock or land affecteth him not. The fluctuations of agricultural or commercial prosperity touch him not, or at worst but change his customers. He is not expected to become bail or surety for any one. No man troubleth him with questioning his religion or politics. He is the only free man in the universe.”<sup>190</sup> Lamb deplores the removal of beggars from the London streets. They can no more be spared than the cries of London. No street corner is complete without them. “They are as indispensable as the Ballad Singer; and in their picturesque attire as ornamental as the Signs of old London. They were the standing morals, emblems, mementos, dial-mottos, the spital sermons, the books for children, the salutary checks and pauses to the high and rushing tide of greasy citizenry.”<sup>191</sup> We have said Lamb was not a moralizer, but he makes a near approach to moralizing in this paper. His sympathy wrought to high degree, expresses itself in a kind of moral indignation against those who withhold their pennies from street beggars, lest they be imposters.

The young chimney-sweepers of London also call forth Lamb's sympathy: “Those tender novices, blooming through their first nigritude, the maternal washings not quite effaced from the cheek—such as come forth with the dawn.”<sup>192</sup> Lamb always writes understandingly of children, but in “The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers” he displays toward these “innocent blacknesses” the depth of his kindly yearning. He enlivens his essay with the incident of a young sweeper found asleep in one of the state beds of Arundel Castle, and describes the “solemn supper” held each year in Smithfield, on St. Bartholomew's Day, when his friend, Jem White, entertained the chimney-sweepers, not yet grown to man's estate. Lamb's keen sense of humor is revealed in his

<sup>189</sup> Oliver Goldsmith. *Miscellaneous Works*, p. 302.

<sup>190</sup> “Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis,” *Works*, vol. II, p. 116.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> “The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers,” *Ibid.*, p. 108.

account of a fall he had while "pacing along Cheapside" and the mirth of a young chimney-sweeper at his discomfort. He likens him to Hogarth's urchin in the March to Finchley, and Lamb's own word painting is worthy of comparison with the work of that great artist of humble life.

The periodical essayists wrote of coffee-houses as a London institution, and Lamb writes of the dispensers of sassafras tea, thereby calling attention to another London custom. This savory drink is dispensed at way-side tea stations in the early dawn to hard-handed artisans, about to begin their daily labors, who are jostled by the rake reeling home from his midnight cups, cursing the steaming tea's "ungenial fume." Lamb also pictures the gardener transporting his cabbages at break of day from Hammersmith to Covent Garden. These vignettes of city life are comparable to those of Swift already referred to. Both writers have chosen to write of London and her humble folk, in the early hours of the morning when the city begins to stir with the life of a new day. Swift, however, does not invest his writing with sympathy, which is a predominant element in Lamb's essay. It is the union of realistic description, characteristic of the eighteenth century, with the sympathetic treatment of humble life, which was a feature of the Romantic Revival, that lends such charm to these essays of Lamb. In their human interest and in the feeling they evoke, Lamb's London street figures may be compared to Wordsworth's country folk. The method used by the essayist is similar to that of the poet. The universal qualities in human nature are illustrated by means of humble people, whose situation in life not only calls forth sympathy, but arouses interest through the realistic fidelity of the character portrayal.

Hazlitt also writes of London life. In his essay, "Londoners and Country People," he defines a cockney as "a person who has never lived out of London, and who has got all his ideas from it." <sup>103</sup> "A real Cockney," Hazlitt says, "is the poorest creature in the world, the most literal, the most mechanical, and yet he too lives in a world of romance—a fairy land of his own. He is a citizen of London; and this abstraction leads his imagination the

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<sup>103</sup> *Works*, vol. VII, p. 66.

finest dance in the world." <sup>184</sup> Every man, no matter how humble his occupation, according to Hazlitt's idea, extracts a kind of glory from the nature of his work. The shopman enjoys the "liberty and gaudy, fluttering pride" of the well-dressed people who pass by; the tailor's stigma "is lost in the elegance of the patterns he provides, and of the persons he adorns." <sup>185</sup> "Even the eye of childhood," Hazlitt believes, finds something for its delight in London, and "is dazzled . . . with the polished splendour of the jewellers' shops, the neatness of the turnery ware, the festoons of artificial flowers, the confectionery, the chemists' shops, the lamps, the horses, the carriages, the sedan-chairs." <sup>186</sup> This comment recalls Hunt's entertaining essays on London shops, particularly his description of the toy shops.

Hazlitt describes the London tea-gardens, with their holiday crowd, and the Londoner, who, confined by his occupation, is shut away from knowledge of the world, and therefore retains his simplicity into manhood. He does not agree with the picture of men in cities Wordsworth presents, in his preface to the *Excursion*. The Londoner, Hazlitt says, "lives in the eye of the world, and the world is his." He has greater opportunity to observe life in its "larger masses and varied movements." <sup>187</sup> He feels himself a part of the public, to which he is joined by bonds of fellowship, and a community of ideas.

From this brief examination of the treatment of nature by the familiar essayists, it is evident that in the amount and romantic coloring of its description, the nineteenth century essay marks a departure from the essays which had gone before. The varied treatment of nature is an important feature of the essays of Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt. There are short incidental descriptions of nature, sometimes only a sentence or two in length, and more formal and extended descriptions. Both are often poetic in feeling and expression. Stress is laid upon the picturesque in scenery, in towns, and in people. London and other places are invested with romantic interest, and all three writers indulge in recollections of

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<sup>184</sup> Op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., pp. 68, 69.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

places and scenes connected with their early life. Their treatment of nature parallels that of the Romantic poets. This likeness is further emphasized by Hazlitt's discussion of nature in its relation to art and life. His theory of man's attachment to natural objects, and the romantic sentiment with which he invests them, reflect Wordsworth's attitude as expressed in his poetry. Moreover the treatment of nature and of the romantic by Hazlitt, Hunt and Lamb is highly individualized. In Hazlitt the emphasis is upon beauty in scenery; in Hunt upon the beauty of natural objects, especially the commonplace; and in Lamb upon the romantic aspects of city life. These things give the essay a new variety, interest and beauty, and very definitely link it with the Romantic poetry of the age.

## CHAPTER V

### SELF-REVELATION

One of the characteristics of the Romantic Revival is the frank outpouring of personal experience and the self-revelation of the individual through the expression of his emotions and feelings. Self-revelation suffused with romantic sentiment and accompanied by impassioned recollection had in the eighteenth century made its appearance in the *Confessions* of Rousseau. The flood of romantic sentiment thus started, soon overflowed into England, where, in the later part of the century, it found an outlet in the novel, and in the "sentimental pantisocracy" of the Lake Poets. In the early nineteenth century self-revelation received a fresh impetus in the work of the English familiar essayists.

Hazlitt may be considered a link between the romantic self-revelation of Rousseau and that of the nineteenth century. A literary as well as a political disciple of Rousseau, Hazlitt early came under the influence of the *Confessions* and *La Nouvelle Heloise*. The period in which he read these works, from his eighteenth to his twentieth year, he speaks of as "the happiest of our life." In his essay, "On Novelty and Familiarity," he recalls the intense pleasure he had in reading Rousseau. Sitting on a sunny bank in a field he read the letter in the *New Eloise* in which St. Preux describes the Pays de Vaud, and never felt his "glassy essence" so much as then. The style, he says, gave him the same sensation "as the drops of morning dew before they are scorched by the sun."<sup>198</sup>

In the *Round Table*, in 1814, Hazlitt speaks of the *Confessions* as the most valuable of all Rousseau's writings; in 1823 he wrote his *Liber Amoris*, which in spirit and manner shows the influence of Rousseau, and in 1825 appeared his "Character of Rousseau," one of the best criticisms of Rousseau yet penned. Edmund Gosse

<sup>198</sup> "On Novelty and Familiarity," *Works*, vol. VII, p. 304.

in his study, "Rousseau in England in the Nineteenth Century"<sup>199</sup> calls attention to Hazlitt's criticism of Rousseau and to the influence exerted by the Genevese upon the Lake Poets, and Byron and Shelley. But Gosse does not mention one of the most important aspects of Rousseau's influence, the romantic impulse he gave to self-revelation in the work of the early nineteenth century familiar essayists. Self-revelation is one of the distinguishing marks of the familiar essay in the seventeenth century, and it is to be found in some degree in the eighteenth century periodical essay, but it is not accompanied by impassioned recollection or other romantic sentiment. Hunt, Lamb, and Hazlitt give to much of their self-revelation a romantic coloring which it had hitherto lacked. It is the romantic aspects of this self-revelation, and the contrasting realistic elements, which deserve consideration.

Hazlitt tells the story of his inner life by means of recalling some particular sensation or emotion. The mind, he says, is like a mechanical instrument that plays a great variety of tunes, but must play them in succession. One idea, in recalling another, excludes all others. "We cannot as it were unfold the whole web of our existence; we must pick out the single threads."<sup>200</sup> This provides the key to Hazlitt's self-revelation. He weaves into the tapestry of his essays, threads from his own experience, telling the story of poignant moments in his life which enable us to know the man. Talfourd speaks of Hazlitt's "intense consciousness of his own individual being," and his essays confirm this opinion. Whatever the theme, Hazlitt's interest sooner or later becomes concentrated on himself. His preoccupation with an inner world made up of his sensations and emotions leads to extended self-analysis, the purpose of which is to account for various states of mind. He carries his probing a step further than Rousseau, who is interested in his sensations as such, and not in the psychology of them. The following examples will serve to illustrate Hazlitt's method. In "Why Distant Objects Please" he analyzes the vividness of his impressions; those connected with sound, smell, and taste, he says are remembered longer than visible objects, and serve better as links in the chain of association. The reason, he believes, is that im-

<sup>199</sup> *Aspects and Impressions*, New York, 1922, p. 169 ff.

<sup>200</sup> "On Going a Journey," *Works*, vol. VI, p. 187.



pressions received by the eye are more frequent than those received in other ways: "Where there is nothing interposed between any two impressions, whatever the distance of time that parts them, they naturally seem to touch; and the renewed impression recalls the former one in full force, without distraction or competitor."<sup>201</sup>

When he comments upon the fact that there is a sensation in traveling into foreign parts that is to be had no otherwise, he analyzes the reason for this "animated but momentary hallucination," and arrives at the conclusion that to exchange our actual for our ideal identity demands an effort, and in order "to feel the pulse of our old transports revive very keenly, we must 'jump' all our present comforts and connexions."<sup>202</sup> This also leads him to consider the limitation of the mind in its ability to recall but one place at a time: "The canvas of the fancy is but of a certain extent, and if we paint one set of objects upon it, they immediately efface every other. We cannot enlarge our conceptions, we only shift our point of view."<sup>203</sup>

Hazlitt's pleasure in recalling his sensations is the result of his love of contemplation and his desire to relive the past. Like Rousseau, he enjoyed living in a world of contemplation where he might indulge his dreams. The impassioned fervor of his recollections is also like Rousseau's, in that they reveal a sensitive nature, and a remarkable memory for impressions even after a lapse of years. Like Rousseau, he enjoyed gathering up "the past moments of his being." Contemplation, emotion, sensation constituted Hazlitt's real world. Although like Carlyle he admired the man who sees what is to be done and does it, it was not the world of action which personally appealed to him, but the world of contemplation. He confesses that what he likes best is to lie whole mornings on his back on Salisbury Plain, "neither knowing or caring how time passes, and thus 'with light-winged toys of feathered Idleness' to melt down hours to moments."<sup>204</sup> Somewhat of this idle humor, he says he inherited from his father. In his essay, "On Living to One's Self," he fondly reviews those

<sup>201</sup> "Why Distant Objects Please," *Works*, vol. VI, pp. 258-59.

<sup>202</sup> "On Going a Journey," *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>204</sup> "On a Sun-Dial," *Ibid.*, vol. XII, p. 58.

years of his life when he did nothing but think. Such a dreaming existence is best he believes. "He who quits it to go in search of realities, generally barter repose for repeated disappointments and vain regrets."<sup>205</sup> In the same essay Hazlitt writes at length of the contemplative life, which "is such as a pure spirit might be supposed to lead, and such an interest as it might take in the affairs of men, calm, contemplative, passive, distant, touched with pity for their sorrows, smiling at their follies without bitterness, sharing their affections, but not troubled by their passions, not seeking their notice, nor once dreamt of by them."<sup>206</sup>

Closely connected with Hazlitt's love of contemplation is his love of the past. It is of the nature of the dreamer to live in the past; of the man of action to anticipate the future. Hazlitt believed that "we are heirs of the past; we count upon the future as our own natural reversion."<sup>207</sup> He conceives the past as a real and substantial part of our being.<sup>208</sup> It is the past that gives him "most delight and most assurance of reality." "I confess," he says, "nothing at present interests me but what has been—the recollections of the impressions of my early life, or events long past, of which only the dim traces remain in a smouldering ruin or half-obsolete custom. . . . I cannot solve the mystery of the past, nor exhaust my pleasure in it. The years, the generations to come, are nothing to me. . . . The only wish I can form, or that ever prompts the passing sigh, would be to live some of my years over again—they would be those in which I enjoyed and suffered most!"<sup>209</sup>

The past is also inexpressibly dear to Hazlitt for the memories it revives of "the glowing image of some bright reality," "the thoughts of which," he says, "can never from my heart."<sup>210</sup> The recollection of this "glowing image" runs like a leit-motif through his work. In the intensity of feeling called forth, it is like Rousseau's recollection of Madame Warens. It is Rousseau's

<sup>205</sup> "On Living to One's Self," *Works*, vol. VI, p. 92.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>207</sup> "On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth," *Ibid.*, vol. XII, p. 156.

<sup>208</sup> "On the Past and Future," *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 22.

<sup>209</sup> "On a Sun-Dial," *Ibid.*, vol. XII, pp. 55-56.

<sup>210</sup> "On the Past and Future," *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 23.

ability to live in his own past that constitutes for Hazlitt the greatest charm of the *Confessions*. "He seems," says Hazlitt, "to gather up the past moments of his being like drops of honey-dew to distil a precious liquor from them; his alternate pleasures and pains are the bead-roll that he tells over, and piously worships; he makes a rosary of the flowers of hope and fancy that strewed his earliest years."<sup>211</sup> Hazlitt with equal truth might have been writing of himself. As he looked back upon his life it seemed as if he had slept it out "in a dream or shadow on the side of the hill of knowledge" where he fed "on books, on thoughts, on pictures, and only heard in half-murmurs the trampling of busy feet, or the noises of the throng below."<sup>212</sup> Too late, he regrets, he awoke from "the dim, twilight existence," and felt a wish to descend to the world of realities.

However bitter or disillusioning Hazlitt's experiences, he retained a childlike simplicity of spirit, revealed when he recalls the pleasures of his childhood and early youth. There is a glamor about the recollections of his childhood which reminds one of Wordsworth's "trailing clouds of glory." He remembers, for instance, the time he visited the Montpelier Tea-gardens at Walworth with his father. As he recalls this scene, he describes his emotions: "A new sense comes upon me, as in a dream; a richer perfume, brighter colours start out; my eyes dazzle; my heart heaves with its new load of bliss, and I am a child again. My sensations are all glossy, spruce, voluptuous, and fine: they wear a candied coat, and are in holiday trim. . . . All that I have observed since, of flowers and plants, and grass-plots, and of suburb delights, seems, to me, borrowed from 'that first garden of my innocence'—to be slips and scions stolen from that bed of memory."<sup>213</sup> In the same essay he says that "both ends of our existence touch upon Heaven," and that as we look back upon "the unsightly masses" of past experience, "the golden cloud soon rests upon their heads, and the purple light of fancy clothes their barren sides!"<sup>214</sup> This

<sup>211</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>212</sup> "On the Fear of Death," *Ibid.*, p. 326.

<sup>213</sup> "Why Distant Objects Please," *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

closely parallels in thought Wordsworth's "recollections of early childhood" in his *Intimations of Immortality*.<sup>215</sup>

Hazlitt sees a kite in the air and it seems to pull at his heart; it becomes a "thing of life" as he remembers the flutter and palpitation with which he watched his own kite when a child: "My little cargo of hopes and fears ascended with it; and as it made a part of my own consciousness then, it does so still, and appears 'like some gay creature of the element,' my playmate when life was young, and twin-born with my earliest recollections."<sup>216</sup> The mood of joyful recollection expressed here, the delight in recalling childhood pleasures, is essentially the same as Wordsworth's in "My Heart Leaps Up," and "To a Butterfly."<sup>217</sup>

The letter-bell passes and it not only fills the street with its clatter but "rings clear through the length of many half-forgotten years." It reminds Hazlitt of his first coming up to town, of the confusion of those early days, of the recollection it brought of a letter to be written, and of the picture it caused to flash upon his mind of a country scene near his home.<sup>218</sup> He recalls again this scene in "My First Acquaintance with Poets," where it is associated in his mind with the first time he heard Coleridge preach. A sound was in his ear "as of a Siren's song." He was "stunned, startled with it, as from deep sleep." "I was at that time," he says, "dumb, inarticulate, helpless, like a worm by the way-side, crushed, bleeding, lifeless; but now, bursting from the deadly bands that "bound them,

'With Styx nine times round them,'

my ideas float on winged words, and as they expand their plumes, catch the golden light of other years."<sup>219</sup> It was as if Hazlitt had heard the music of the spheres. It seemed to him that "Poetry

<sup>215</sup> "Ode on Intimations of Immortality," *Poems*, ed. by Matthew Arnold, Lond., 1903, p. 201 ff.

<sup>216</sup> "Why Distant Objects Please," *Works*, vol. VI, p. 258.

<sup>217</sup> Two of Wordsworth's poems have this title. The one referred to here begins; "Stay near me—do not take thy flight." *Poems*, p. 115.

<sup>218</sup> "The Letter-Bell," *Works*, vol. XII, p. 235 f.

<sup>219</sup> "My First Acquaintance with Poets," *Ibid.*, p. 260.

and Philosophy had met together" and that "Truth and Genius had embraced, under the eye and with the sanction of Religion."<sup>220</sup>

Such impassioned recollection, associated with familiar scenes is also characteristic of the early nineteenth century romantic poets, particularly Wordsworth. The similarity between Rousseau and Wordsworth in the expression of sentiment has been noted by Hazlitt:<sup>221</sup> "We see no difference between them, than that the one wrote in prose and the other in poetry; and that prose is perhaps better adapted to express those local and personal feelings, which are inveterate habits in the mind, than poetry, which embodies its imaginary creations." Hazlitt prefers Rousseau's exclamation "*Ah, voila de la pervenche!*" because it "comes more home to the mind" than Wordsworth's discovery of the linnet's nest "with five blue eggs," or his address to the cuckoo. Also Hazlitt "will confidently match the citizen of Geneva's adventures on the Lake of Bienne against the Cumberland Poet's floating dreams on the Lake of Grasmere."<sup>222</sup> After noting the similarity between Rousseau and Wordsworth in their power to create interest out of their own feelings, in their weaving numberless recollections into one sentiment, and in their winding their own being around whatever object occurs to them, Hazlitt points out an important difference. "Rousseau . . . interests you in certain objects by interesting you in himself: Mr. Wordsworth would persuade you that the most insignificant objects are interesting in themselves, because he is interested in them. . . . This is not imagination, but want of sense."<sup>223</sup> Hazlitt followed Rousseau's method rather than Wordsworth's, and interests you in himself.

Hazlitt, however, in his figurative use of language resembles the poet rather than the prose writer. He speaks of sleeping out his life "in a dream or shadow on the side of the hill of knowledge," of his sensations wearing "a candied coat"; of the first "garden of his innocence." As he looks back upon the "unsightly masses" of past experience, "the golden light of fancy rests upon their heads, and the purple cloud soon clothes their barren sides." Of the

<sup>220</sup> Op. cit., p. 261.

<sup>221</sup> "On the Character of Rousseau," *Works*, vol. 1, p. 92.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

fair creature whose image is engraven in Hazlitt's inmost soul, he exclaims, "Wherever she treads, pale primroses, like her face, vernal hyacinths, like her brow, spring up beneath her feet, and music hangs on every bough." <sup>224</sup>

But not all of Hazlitt's self-realization is romantic in character. He could write of himself most realistically, and the contrast provided by the combination of romantic and realistic elements adds greatly to the interest of his familiar essays.

At the basis of Hazlitt's realism is his love of truth, the touchstone by which he tested and judged both people and things. "Where the pursuit of truth has been the habitual study of any man's life, the love of truth will be his ruling passion," <sup>225</sup> Hazlitt wrote, and this is the key to his philosophy of life. He also says that "to prefer the truth to all other things, it requires that the mind shall have been at some pains in finding it out." <sup>226</sup> He spent his life in seeking the truth, and if at times he seems pessimistic, this is the result of his effort to see things as they are. Like Carlyle, he wished to strip off the outer garments to seek the reality within. Therefore he spared neither himself nor others in his desire to reveal man as he is, and did not flinch if the portrait was unflattering.

One of the outstanding traits of Hazlitt's character is the steadfastness of his opinions. Once having made up his mind, he seldom changed it. "I pretend," he says, "to be master of my own mind. . . . I am not to be brow-beat or wheedled out of any of my settled convictions. Opinion to opinion, I will face any man." <sup>227</sup> He says he sympathized *beforehand* with different views and feelings that might be entertained on a subject, and was thus prevented from flinging himself into contrary extremes *afterwards*.<sup>228</sup> This accounts for his consistent attitude toward the French Revolution, and his dissatisfaction with Wordsworth and others, whom he considered turncoats.

Hazlitt speaks with the greatest frankness of his friends. Few

<sup>224</sup> "On Great and Little Things," *Works*, vol. VI, p. 236.

<sup>225</sup> "On Consistency of Opinion," *Ibid.*, vol. XI, p. 509.

<sup>226</sup> "On Poetical Versatility," *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 152-53.

<sup>227</sup> "On Consistency of Opinion," *Ibid.*, vol. XI, pp. 508-09.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 509.

of those whom he has known intimately "continue on the same friendly footing, or combine the steadiness with the warmth of attachment." He confesses that he has quarreled with nearly all of them. "Old friends are like meats served up repeatedly, cold, comfortless and distasteful."<sup>229</sup> "There is no one," he says with regard to Wordsworth, "in whom I have been more disappointed . . . nor with whom I am more disposed on certain points to quarrel: but the love of truth and justice which obliges me to do this, will not suffer me to blench his merits."<sup>230</sup>

Hazlitt writes without disguise of his attitude toward the world. He is a good hater and he glories in it: "Without something to hate, we should lose the very spring of thought and action." "Hatred alone is immortal." "Pure good," he believes, "soon grows insipid" and "wants variety and spirit."<sup>231</sup> He speaks without reserve of the failure of his own life: "My public and private hopes have been left a ruin, or remain only to mock me."<sup>232</sup> When he contemplates the end of life, he reflects that if he had indeed lived, he would not care to die, but he does not like "a contract of pleasure broken off unfulfilled, a marriage with joy unconsummated, a promise of happiness rescinded."<sup>233</sup> He is courageous enough to express the bitterness toward life which he feels, but his zest for life, and his joy in the many things he found to like are an antidote to his bitterness.

It would be possible from Hazlitt's essays to make a reasonable long list of the things he enjoyed. Some of his chief interests in life he has expressed in a sentence: "So have I loitered my life away, reading books, looking at pictures, going to plays, hearing, thinking, writing on what pleased me best."<sup>234</sup> If we add to this his love of good conversation, of traveling, of taking long walks, and his enjoyment of nature, the list will be fairly complete. Some of the happiest hours of his life were spent in viewing his favorite paintings and in attending the theatre, pastimes of which he has

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<sup>229</sup> "On the Pleasure of Hating," *Works*, vol. VI, pp. 130-131.

<sup>230</sup> "On Genius and Common Sense," *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>231</sup> "On the Pleasure of Hating," *Ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 128.

<sup>232</sup> "On Fear of Death," *Ibid.*, vol. VI, p. 325.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>234</sup> "My First Acquaintance with Poets," *Ibid.*, vol. XII, p. 269.

dow. . . . Add to this a watch-dog at a distance, and a moaning wind, no matter how "melancholy," provided it does not blow a tempest . . . and we drop to sleep in a transport of comfort." <sup>289</sup>

Imagination is the well-spring of Hunt's interest in the commonplace. "We are among those," he says, "who believe with the old romance of Heliodorus, that under circumstances which affect the earliest periods of existence, familiar objects are not without their influence upon the imagination." <sup>290</sup> His desire to invest the commonplace with imagination may be seen from his essay "Amiability Superior to Intellect," in which he says that commonplaces "are the common clay of which human intercourse is made, and therefore are as respectable in our eyes as any other of the ordinary materials of our planet, however desirable we may be of warming them into flowers. Nay, flowers they have, provided the clay be pure and kindly." <sup>291</sup> Hunt also considered the commonplace romantic, and in "Romance of the Commonplace" writes, "Every sentiment . . . pushed to excess, bears, from that excess, a character of romance: even dulness may be romantic." <sup>292</sup> The power of common objects, through the association of ideas, to call forth imagination, is, of course, one of the tenets of nineteenth century romanticism. He expresses this idea when he says: "The beauty of this unlimited power of suggestion in writing is, that you may take up the driest and most commonplace of all possible subjects, and strike a light out of it to warm your intellect and your heart by. . . . It is the benevolent provision of Nature, that, in proportion as you feel the necessity of extracting interest from common things, you are enabled to do so." <sup>293</sup>

Hunt was keenly interested in the imaginative faculty of the mind, and in addition to his work "Imagination and Fancy" he frequently discusses imagination in his familiar essays. He conceived the universe in which he dwelt as consisting of two worlds: "the world that we can measure with line and rule, and the world that we feel with our hearts and imaginations. To be sensible to

<sup>289</sup> "Beds and Bedrooms," *Men, Women and Books*, p. 73.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>291</sup> *The Seer*, vol. II, pp. 134-35.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160-61.



the truth of only one of these, is to know truth but by halves." <sup>294</sup> He defines matter-of-fact as "our perception of the grosser and more external shapes of truth." "Fiction represents the residuum and the mystery. To love matter of fact is to have a lively sense of the visible and immediate; to love fiction is to have as lively a sense of the possible and the remote." Fiction is of course used here in the sense of the imaginative. "These two senses," he continues, "if they exist at all, are of necessity as real, the one as the other." <sup>295</sup> In his essay "A Novel Party" he plays with the idea that the creations of the novelists have a reality. "Common physical palpability," he says, "is only a proof of mortality." <sup>296</sup> "But the immortal people in Pope and Fielding, the deathless generations in Chaucer, in Shakespeare, in Goldsmith, in Sterne, and Le Sage, and Cervantes, acquaintances and friends who remain for ever the same . . . —what is the amount of the actual effective existence of millions of Jacksons and Tompkinses compared with theirs?" <sup>297</sup> Hunt has expressed a similar idea in his essay "On the Realities of the Imagination," where he says: "The advantage, nay even the test, of seeing and hearing, at any time, is not in the seeing and hearing, but in the ideas we realize, and the pleasure we derive. Intellectual objects, therefore, inasmuch as they come home to us, are as true a part of the stock of nature, as visible ones." <sup>298</sup> It is necessary to understand this attitude of Hunt's toward what constituted reality for him in order to appreciate the romantic elements of his self-revelation.

It has been noted that Hunt said that to love fiction was to have a sense of "the possible and the remote." This, of course, is just another way of expressing the romantic glamor of the past. Hunt, like Lamb and Hazlitt, found pleasure in turning to the past and living over again in imagination events connected with his early life. In his *Autobiography* he says: "Life often seems a dream; but there are occasions when the sudden reappearance of early objects, by the intensity of their presence, not only renders the

<sup>294</sup> "Fiction and Matter of Fact," *Men, Women, and Books*, p. 3.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>298</sup> *Indicator*, pt. I, p. 178.

interval less present to the consciousness than a very dream, but makes the portion of life which preceded it seem to have been the most real of all things, and our only undreaming time."<sup>299</sup>

In common with his fellow essayists, Hunt muses upon death and the necessity of giving up the good things of life. In his essay, "An Earth Upon Heaven," he turns in thought to a future state of existence, which he contemplates not in a tragic or disillusioned manner, but in a joyful one. "Frenchmen have died sitting in their chairs, full-dressed and powdered. I have a better taste in mortality than that; but I think I could drop off with a decent compromise between thought and forgetfulness, sitting with my pipe by a fireside in an old elbow chair."<sup>300</sup> He expresses the hope that he may become accustomed to heaven, by passing through other heavens of "a less superhuman nature."<sup>301</sup> "Familiar as we are," he says, "both with joy and sorrow, and accustomed to surprises and strange sights of imagination, it is difficult to fancy even the delight of suddenly emerging into a new and boundless state of existence, where everything is marvelous, and opposed to our experience. We could wish to take gently to it; to be loosed not entirely at once."<sup>302</sup> Like Lamb, he would not lose the good things of this life: "Earth and its capabilities—are these nothing? And are they to come to nothing? Is there no beautiful realization of the fleeting type that is shown us? No body to this shadow? No quenching to this taught and continued thirst? No arrival at these natural homes and resting-places, which are so heavenly to our imaginations, even though they be built of clay, and are situate in the fields of our infancy?"<sup>303</sup> "To realize everything that we have justly desired on earth, will *be* heaven," Hunt believes, and he makes a list of the "items" that he would like to have in another world. They include a friend, "generous, just, entertaining," with whom he will read the poets, and renew an earthly evening "picked out of a dozen Christmases"; a mistress, "good-

<sup>299</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 41.

<sup>300</sup> "Coffee-Houses and Smoking," *Essays (Selected)* (Everyman Edition), pp. 43-44.

<sup>301</sup> *The Companion*, p. 170.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

tempered, laughing, serious"; books—"Shakespeare and Spenser, he says, "should write us *new ones!*"<sup>304</sup> Hunt ends his musings upon a future life in humorous fashion, indulging in the fancy which he so much enjoyed. "For horses, we shall ride a Pegasus, or Ariosto's Hippogriff, or Sinbad's Roc. We mean, for our parts, to ride them all, having a passion for fabulous animals. . . . There will be enough cold in the winter to make a fire pleasant of an evening. The fire will be of sweet-smelling turf and sunbeams; but it will have a look of coal. If we choose, now and then we shall even have inconveniences."<sup>305</sup>

Hunt shares with Wordsworth and Lamb a deep understanding and love of childhood. Full of pathos is his essay on "Deaths of Little Children," a pathos similar to that with which Wordsworth has invested the graves of children in "We are Seven." "The remembered innocence and endearments of a child stand us instead of virtues that have died older," Hunt says.<sup>306</sup> It is characteristic of his philosophy that out of sorrow he extracts happiness, and in the loss of a child, he finds balm for his grief. His thought is that those who have lost a child are never without one. The memory of the child lives on in their hearts, while that of their other children is lost, as they grow older. Writing within sight of the grave of a loved one, he says: "It is the existence of that grave which doubles every charm of the spot; which links the pleasures of our childhood and manhood together; which puts a hushing tenderness in the winds, and a patient joy upon the landscape; which seems to unite heaven and earth, mortality and immortality, the grass of the tomb and the grass of the green field: and gives a more maternal aspect to the whole kindness of nature."<sup>307</sup>

Quite different in the sentiment it evokes is the incident Hunt relates in his essay "Twelfth Night," of the small urchin, "one of those equivocal animal-spirits of the streets." Standing with his nose against the window of a pastry cook's, the child views with interest another boy inside the shop trying to choose between two

<sup>304</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>306</sup> *Indicator*, pt. I, p. 183.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*

buns. Hunt follows in imagination the emotions of the boy on the outside: "He shifts the expression of his mouth and the shrug of his body at every perilous approximation which the chooser makes to a second-rate bunn. (sic.) He is like a bowler following the nice inflections of the bias; for he wishes him nothing but success: the occasion is too great for envy. He feels all the generous sympathy of a knight of old, when he saw another within an ace of winning some glorious prize, and his arm doubtful of the blow."<sup>308</sup> Hunt's description of the boy as "the nightingale of mud and cold," recalls Lamb's comparison of the young chimney-sweepers to the matin lark.<sup>309</sup>

Also very different in nature is Hunt's philosophizing on childhood in his "Thoughts on Human Nature."<sup>310</sup> "Nature," he reflects, . . . "appears to succeed best in making childhood and youth. The symphony is a little perturbed; but in what a sprightly manner the air sets off! What purity! What grace! What touching simplicity! Then comes sin, or the notion of it, and 'breaks the fair music.'"<sup>311</sup> Do men die, Hunt questions, in order that life may be renewed as often as possible, or do children grow old "that our consciousness may attain to some better mode of being through a rough path?" No answer is given by Nature, he says, but her "calm and resolute silence tells us at once to hope for the future and to do our best to enjoy the present."<sup>312</sup>

"Cruelty to Children," one of Hunt's essays in the *Companion*,<sup>313</sup> offers a strong contrast to his other essays on childhood in its practical wisdom and common-sense viewpoint, and shows he could be as didactic as any eighteenth century essayist when he chose. "The great art of being a good parent," he says, "consists in setting a good example, and in maintaining that union of dispassionate firmness with habitual good humor, which a child never *thinks* of treating with disrespect."<sup>314</sup>

<sup>308</sup> "Twelfth Night," *The Seer*, v. 2, p. 118.

<sup>309</sup> "The Praise of Chimney Sweepers," *Works*, vol. II.

<sup>310</sup> *Indicator*, pt. II, pp. 62-63.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>313</sup> *The Companion*, p. 217 ff.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20.

Much of Hunt's self-revelation is most realistic, especially in his *Autobiography*.<sup>315</sup> In the early chapters, he follows a chronological arrangement in telling of his ancestors, childhood, school days and youth. Thereafter he makes little attempt to date events in his life, but presents its chief interests and happenings in successive chapters, like separate essays in form. Chapter six, for example, is devoted to his recollection of famous singers, dancers and actors; chapter seven to an account of his favorite books and authors, and to his entrance into theatrical criticism; chapter nine to the *Examiner*; chapter ten to his literary acquaintances; chapter eleven to political characters. By thus arranging his material by subject, Hunt succeeds in giving a particularly vivid and interesting impression of his life. Moreover, he is writing from the vantage ground of ripe age, and he continually views his life in retrospect, commenting upon his decisions and actions, feelings and emotions, pointing out his mistakes, subjecting himself to an admirable self-criticism, free from sentimentality and self-pity. This objective manner of viewing himself constitutes one of the most realistic features of the *Autobiography*. Hunt's realistic method is further evidenced in a study of the characteristics of his ancestors, which he finds reproduced in himself—"a man is but his parents, or some other of his ancestors, drawn out."<sup>316</sup> Such genetic study, sometimes carried to extremes, was a feature of eighteenth century biography. Hunt does not overemphasize his inherited traits, but devotes sufficient attention to them to supply the key to his character. "I may call myself," he says, "in every sense of the word . . . a son of mirth and melancholy."<sup>317</sup> On his father's side he came from a line of "creoles and claret drinkers, very polite and clerical," and on the maternal side his forbears were "sailors and rough subjects, with a mitigation . . . of Quakerism."<sup>318</sup> His mother's timidity and melancholy strove in him with the gay, happy, carefree temperament and "animal spirits" inherited from his father.

<sup>315</sup> As has already been noted this work is included in a study of the familiar essay because of its essay-like character.

<sup>316</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 37.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Hunt does not, like Hazlitt, indulge in self-probing, or in minute analysis of his sensations and emotions. He states simply, certain facts concerning himself which are important indexes to his character, as when he says: "I never in my life had any personal ambition whatsoever, but that of adding to the list of authors, and doing some good as a cosmopolite."<sup>319</sup> In spite of hardships and disappointments which might have embittered another, he is able to write: "I am now in my seventy-fourth year, and I have seen a good deal of the world, the dark side as well as the light, and I say that human nature is a very good and kindly thing, and capable of all sorts of virtues. . . . To evils I have owed some of my greatest blessings."<sup>320</sup>

Like his fellow-essayists, Hunt reveals himself in writing of the things he liked best. In recalling them, he frequently mingles the romantic with the realistic. Books, music and the theatre were among his chief enjoyments, and his *Autobiography* and familiar essays are the richer in consequence. Books were his constant companions—"a never-ceasing consolation." As a schoolboy he developed a passion for reading which remained with him all his life. "How I loved," he says, "those little six-penny numbers containing whole poets! I doted on their size; I doted on their type, on their ornaments, on their wrappers containing lists of other poets, and on the engravings from Kirk. I bought them over and over again, and used to get up select sets which disappeared like buttered crumpets; for I could resist neither giving them away, nor possessing them."<sup>321</sup> Hunt's favorites in his youth, were Spenser, Collins, Gray and the *Arabian Nights*, and Spenser continued to be his life-long favorite.<sup>322</sup> He fell passionately in love, he says, with Collins and Gray, and wrote a poem called *Winter*, as a result of reading Thomson.<sup>323</sup> In later life he spent much of his time in his study surrounded by his favorite works; when he went to prison, his books accompanied him; when he sailed for Italy his favorite volumes went too, and were the solace of that ill-fated

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<sup>319</sup> Op. cit., p. 133.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., pp. 69-70.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., pp. 69-70.

journey. . . . "I can hardly be said to have ever been without a book," he writes, "for if not in my hand, it was at my side, or in my pocket."<sup>824</sup> The magic that a book held for Hunt, he has well expressed in his essay "Breakfast in Summer." "We read, in old stories," he says, "of enchanters who drew gardens out of snow; and of tents no bigger than a nut-shell, which opened out over a whole army. Of like nature is the magic of a book,—a casket, from which you may draw out, at will, bowers to sit under, and affectionate beauties to sit by, and have trees, flowers, and an exquisite friend, all at one spell."<sup>825</sup>

The books he liked to have about him most were Chaucer, Spenser, the minor poems of Milton, the *Arabian Nights*, Theocritus, Ariosto, and "such old good-natured speculations as Plutarch's *Morals*."<sup>826</sup> Hunt's favorite authors furnish the subject matter of several of his essays, and are the occasion for some of his best prose writing. "It is true," he says, "one forgets one's books while writing—at least they say so. For my part, I think I have them in a sort of sidelong mind's eye; like a second thought, which is more like a water-fall, or a whispering wind."<sup>827</sup> Whatever his subject, it furnishes him an excuse to introduce some comment on his literary favorites. For instance the weather, the subject of his paper "Fine Days in January and February," makes him think of Chaucer, from whom he quotes, and after commenting upon him, he begs the reader's pardon for the digression, and says: "It is . . . an old fancy of ours to associate the ideas of Chaucer with that of an early and vigorous manifestation of light and pleasure."<sup>828</sup>

Hunt had, like Lamb, an affection not only for the authors of his books, but for the books themselves. "Sitting . . . among my books," he says, "walled round with all the comfort and protection which they and my fire-side could afford me . . . I began to consider how I loved the authors of those books: how I loved them, too, not only for the imaginative pleasures they afford me, but for

<sup>824</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 151.

<sup>825</sup> *The Seer*, vol. I, p. 84.

<sup>826</sup> "My Books," *Indicator*, pt. II, p. 141.

<sup>827</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>828</sup> *The Companion*, p. 181.

their making me love the very books themselves, and delight to be in contact with them." <sup>329</sup> That books were his solace is clear from many passages in his essays. "I entrench myself in my books," he writes, "equally against sorrow and the weather." . . . "If a melancholy thought is importunate, I give another glance at my *Spenser*. When I speak of being in contact with my books, I mean it literally. I like to lean my head against them." <sup>330</sup> In his love of "bookstall urbanity" Hunt says he yields to none. But he likes to see his favorite purchases neatly bound, for most of them "a plain good old binding," but for his *Arabian Nights* the binding should be "in as fine and flowery a style as possible," with "an engraving to every dozen pages." <sup>331</sup> "May I confess," he asks, "that the passage which I recollect with the greatest pleasure in Cicero, is where he says that books delight us at home, and are no impediment abroad; travel with us, ruralize with us . . . I am so much of this opinion, that I do not care to be anywhere without having a book or books at hand, and . . . stuff the coach or post-chaise with them whenever I travel." <sup>332</sup>

Hunt's reading covered a wider range than that of either Lamb or Hazlitt, and furnished him with a wealth of apt quotations which adorn and enrich his essays.

Hunt reveals his love of music in two of his essays, "The Piano-Forte" and in "Why Sweet Music Produces Sadness." He mentions his liking for old songs and other musical compositions in his *Autobiography* and in several of his familiar essays. He calls music "one of God's goods," and says, "if we do not avail ourselves of it . . . we turn not our hands, ears and souls to their just account, nor reap half the benefit we might from the very air that sounds it." <sup>333</sup> He deplores the fact that the poor in England have not the opportunity to enjoy music, and attributes it to the rich having monopolized music, and made it costly. <sup>334</sup> The greatest men, Hunt says, have been lovers of music, and in consequence

<sup>329</sup> "My Books," *Indicator*, pt. II, p. 136.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136-37.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>333</sup> "The Piano-Forte," *The Seer*, vol. II, p. 90.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.



have united both action and contemplation. His answer to the question "why sweet music produces sadness?" is, that "we have an instinctive sense of the fugitive and perishing nature of all sweet things,—of beauty, of youth, of life; of all those fair shows of the world, of which music seems to be the voice, and of whose transitory nature it reminds us most when it is most beautiful, because it is then that we most regret our mortality." <sup>335</sup>

In his *Autobiography*, Hunt recalls the songs that were popular when he was a boy; they abounded in Strephons and Delias, he says, and "the association of early ideas with that kind of commonplace" <sup>336</sup> gave him more than a tolerance for it. This kind of sophisticated sentiment which made it possible for men and women to play at being shepherds and shepherdesses, finds a responsive chord in him: "I think of the many heartfelt smiles that must have welcomed love letters and verses containing that sophisticate imagery, and of the no less genuine tears that were shed over the documents when faded; and criticism is swallowed up in those human drops." <sup>337</sup> He attributes to his sympathy with such sentiment his interest in the works of Shenstone, and in the correspondence of the countesses of Hertford and Pomfret, and of Lady Luxborough. "The feeling was true," he says, "though the expression was sophisticate and a fashion; and they who cannot see the feeling for the mode, do the very thing which they think they scorn; that is, sacrifice the greater consideration for the less." <sup>338</sup> He recalls his pleasure in finding on a bookstall two songs which were the only ones he remembered singing as a child. "I looked on them," he says, "with the accumulated tenderness of sixty-three years of age. . . . What a difference between the little smooth-faced boy at his mother's knee, encouraged to lift up his voice to the piano-forte, and the battered grey-headed senior, looking again, for the first time, on what he had sung at the distance of more than half a century! . . . There I stood; and Wardour Street, every street, all London, as it now exists, became to me as if it had never been." <sup>339</sup>

<sup>335</sup> "Why Sweet Music Produces Sadness," *The Seer*, vol. II, p. 103.

<sup>336</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 38.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

This brief summary will emphasize the fact that a great deal of the self-revelation of Hazlitt, Lamb and Hunt contains romantic elements. In the frankness and fulness with which they reveal themselves, as well as in the romantic coloring of their writing, they differ from the essayists of the eighteenth century. Addison and Steele often write in the first person, tell of their own experiences, and take the reader into their confidence, but they are not personal or intimate in the manner of the later familiar essayists, nor do they ever write of themselves with the passionate intensity which characterizes the self-revelation of Hazlitt, Lamb and Hunt. As one critic has well observed, the personal element in the essays of Addison and Steele "is no greater than that found in the most objective writers,—in dramatists, novelists, or short-story writers. . . . We see very clearly Steele's opinions on duelling, on women, on marriage; and in a sense we thus come to know his personality. But in the same sense we know Shakespeare in his dramas, or Thackeray in his novels."<sup>340</sup> Moreover the periodical essayists were hampered in their self-revelation by the use of fictitious mouthpieces. The "lucubrations" of Mr. Spectator or of Isaac Bickerstaff are not strongly individual, and at times it is difficult to determine who is behind the mask. On the contrary, the self-revelation of Lamb would never be mistaken for that of Hunt or Hazlitt. It is the strong individuality which stamps the work of these three essayists which makes their self-revelation different from what went before. This individuality expresses itself in both a romantic and realistic manner. The romantic coloring is particularly evident in the way past events are recalled, especially scenes and incidents remembered from childhood. In writing of the things which have given them pleasure, as well as of their sorrows and disappointments, Hazlitt, Lamb and Hunt have left highly individualized portraits of themselves. The realistic details mingled with the romantic elements of their self-revelation give the necessary contrast and lend verisimilitude. It is the blending of the romantic and realistic which constitutes the great charm of the self-revelation of these essayists.

<sup>340</sup> Prof. P. V. D. Shelly, "The Familiar Essay," *University of Pennsylvania. Public Lectures*, 1916-17, p. 245.

## CHAPTER VI

### IMAGINATION AND EXALTATION OF FEELING

Perhaps the greatest difference in the work of the early nineteenth century from what had gone before is that it contains elements which appeal to the emotions and the imagination in a manner new to the essay. The familiar essayists, like the Romantic poets, viewed the world afresh, and in their search for truth looked deep within their own hearts. Their lyrical cries represent not only a revolt against restraint, convention, imitation, and a narrow social order, but a delight in the free expression of their own personalities. And their self-revelation is not confined to conscious outpouring of spirit, but manifests itself in the individuality which stamps their work and colors the whole fabric of their thought. They write to a large extent out of their own experience, and spin their essays from the stuff of life itself. The individuality of their work is intensified by the imagination and fancy with which it is suffused. This is particularly true of Lamb's essays, in which the play of fancy continually reveals fresh aspects of his personality and gives added flavor to his writing. Hunt and Hazlitt also reveal themselves through the imaginative element of their work. Hunt creates for himself an ideal world in which he loves to dwell, surrounded by the pleasing images his mind calls forth. The way in which he invests the ordinary things of life with imagination serves to reveal the man. A pebble, a drop of rain upon the window, the sight of bricks and mortar on a hot day, are sufficient to start a train of recollection and imaginative reflection. By means of impassioned recollection Hazlitt unfolds his past life, revealing not only the things from which he has derived intense pleasure, but also his disappointments, and the unsatisfied yearning of his heart. His personality is further revealed in his search for truth. His uncompromising spirit goes unsatisfied in its search for the ideal, and hence the elements of struggle and revolt which characterize much of his work.

Dial," he again speaks of these fleeting glimpses of beauty: "Perhaps some thoughts I have set down float before me like motes before my half-shut eyes, or some vivid image of the past by forcible contrast rushes by me—'Diana and her fawn, and all the glories of the antique world'; and then I start away to prevent the iron entering my soul, and let fall some tears into the stream of time which separates me farther and farther from all I once loved." <sup>358</sup>

Hazlitt's imaginative faculty is strongly revealed in the glamor with which he invests the past. "All that strikes the imagination, or excites any interest in the mighty scene, is *what has been*," <sup>359</sup> he says. Some event in his own life usually serves to start a train of recollection accompanied with imaginative fervor which at times becomes lyrical. Passionate yearning, frustrated hopes, an intense desire for life lived to the fullest are in his heart cry, "Ye woods that crown the clear brow of Norman Court, why do I revisit ye so oft, and feel a soothing consciousness of your presence, but that your high tops waving in the wind recal (sic) to me the hours and years that are for ever fled, that ye renew in ceaseless murmurs the story of long-cherished hopes and bitter disappointment, that in your solitudes and tangled wilds I can wander and lose myself, as I wander on and am lost in the solitude of my own heart. . . . Without that face pale as the primrose with hyacinthine locks, forever shunning and forever haunting me, mocking my waking thoughts as in a dream. . . . Without that form gliding before me like Oread or Dryad in fabled groves, what should I do, how pass away the listless leaden-footed hours? Then wave, wave on, ye woods of Tuderley, and lift your high tops in the air; my sighs and vows uttered by your mystic voice breathe into me my former being, and enable me to bear the thing I am!" <sup>360</sup>

Hunt also enjoyed dwelling in an imaginative world, but it is a different world from Hazlitt's. Unlike Hazlitt, he does not seek to escape from life by dwelling upon past events and investing them with romantic fancy; he adds to the enjoyment and richness of his life by continually associating what he sees with fanciful and

<sup>358</sup> "On a Sun-Dial," *Works*, vol. XII, pp. 58-59.

<sup>359</sup> "The Love of Power or Action," *Ibid.*, vol. XI, p. 266.

<sup>360</sup> "On the Past and Future," *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. 24-25.

poetic ideas. The most commonplace things suggest to him beauty and set his imagination to work. The images he recalls are not usually connected with events in his past life, but result from his wide reading in imaginative literature. In his essay "On the Realities of the Imagination" he reveals the extent to which imagination has enriched his life, and emphasizes the reality of its pleasures. Let as many 'glad imaginations' throng the mind as possible, he pleads: "Read the magical works of the poets, and they will come. If you doubt their existence, ask yourself whether you feel pleasure at the idea of them; whether you are moved into delicious smiles, or tears as delicious. If you are, the result is the same to you, whether they exist or not." "Knowledge, sympathy, imagination," he says, "are all divining-rods" with which man discovers treasure. Hunt is more fanciful than imaginative in a poetic sense. The delicate fancy in which he sometimes indulges is well illustrated in his Introduction to the *Wishing-Cap Papers*, in which he imagines himself a spirit: "A spirit I certainly am, by universal acknowledgment; though what sort of one has been much contested. . . . Certainly I am not a malignant spirit, though I trifle now and then with a Caliban. Neither am I the devil on two sticks, confined to my bottle; nor the spirit, that according to the Italian poet, dwelt in the smoke of roast meat. But like certain spirits in poetry and romance, I have seen a good deal of the world, visible and invisible. Like them, I see knowledge. Like them I am fond of music, of the air, of the trees and flowers, and of liberty. . . . Like a spirit I can dilate myself, till mountains become mole-hills; or shrink into such diminutive compass, as to stand by the side of a brook, and live in imagination on the banks of it, with the little insects, as if it were some mighty river. Millions of times have I ridden on the bat's back, and gone to sleep in a buttercup. But my tears inform me that I am human, to say nothing of my frailties."<sup>361</sup>

Although Hunt emphasizes the part that imagination plays in life, and lived to a large extent in a world created by his fancy, he never rises in his essays to the lyrical heights of Lamb and Hazlitt. He does not recall the past in an impassioned manner,

<sup>361</sup> *Wishing-Cap Papers*, p. 18.

nor people it with fleeting shapes drawn from classical mythology ; nor does he deeply stir our feelings or emotions. His imagination plays over the surface of things, and is more concerned with extracting pleasure from the commonplace, than in winging its way upward. The difference in the quality of Hunt's imagination as compared with Lamb's and Hazlitt's may be partially owing to the fact that he lived too much in a world of books. His experiences are vital to him in the degree that he can relate them to his reading. The continual association of incidents in his life with literary allusions shows his tendency to view life through the medium of books. He is less original, less searching, and less often concerned with fundamentals than either Lamb or Hazlitt. His struggles, doubts, perplexities, fears are not given imaginative expression, but he reveals in a fanciful and sometimes poetic manner his love of nature and his delight in simple pleasures, which he would have all men share.

On the contrary Hazlitt pours forth his innermost thoughts in a flood-tide of self-revelation which is frequently highly imaginative in a poetic sense. He stirs us emotionally because of the intensity of his own feeling. Life disappoints and frustrates him, and he cries out against it or seeks solace in recalling happier days which he invests with the glamor of the past.

Of a yet different quality is Lamb's imagination. He is not concerned with giving voice to defeated hopes, like Hazlitt, nor is he interested in preaching a gospel of beauty, like Hunt, but he gives us the full flavor of his personality, by letting his mind play in an imaginative manner over whatever pleases his fancy. He sees deeply into life, but his observations are cloaked with so much humor and infused with such originality that the reader thinks of them not as a "criticism of life" but as a delight shared.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

In thus tracing the elements old and new which went into the making of the familiar essay in the early nineteenth century, it becomes clear that many elements from the essays of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries came over into the nineteenth century familiar essay. It carries on the traditions of the Montaigne type of essay in its literary flavor, its self-revelation, its easy conversational style, its digressions, and in the choice of subject according to the whim of the author. It shows the influence of the seventeenth century in style, theme, and the use of the "character." It exhibits many of the characteristics of the eighteenth century periodical essay in its realistic description, humor, intimate style, anecdotes, incidents, and reported conversation. In theme also it shows the influence of the periodical essay. More specific influences are to be seen in the use of the "character," the character-sketch and the familiar letter. The character-sketch not only adds to the interest of the familiar essay, but definitely contributes to its development, through its wealth of excellent portraiture and its emphasis upon individuality and the revelation of fundamental human qualities. The letter likewise contributes to the interest of the familiar essay, and its use demonstrates the close union between the two forms. This union is effected by the introduction of letters into the essay, by the employing of a style characteristic of the familiar letter and by the use of material from actual letters, either as part of the essay, or to furnish a theme.

In spite of seventeenth and eighteenth century influence, however, the divergence of the early nineteenth century essay from the periodical essays of the Tatler-Spectator type is so marked as to demand explanation. The familiar essay not only flourished anew, but reached its highest development in the work of Hunt, Hazlitt and Lamb. The factors contributing to its development

were varied. The intellectual curiosity aroused by the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution resulted in the establishment of literary periodicals which fostered the essay by the greater amount of space they afforded, by the emphasis they placed upon literature and the fine arts, and by the high standard of excellence in writing set by their editors. Increased wealth, extension of education, and improved methods in the printing and distributing of periodicals secured for them a wide circulation. The essayists were thus writing for a larger and more cosmopolitan public, and the essay took on greater variety of theme and a universality of interest that it had heretofore lacked.

But the most powerful influence in the shaping of the new essay was the Romantic Revival. In the essays of Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt may be traced Romantic elements which parallel those found in the Romantic poets. This influence is the more pronounced because of the friendship that existed between the essayists and the poets. It manifests itself particularly in the romantic coloring given to the love of nature and the picturesque and to self-revelation in the familiar essay, and in the highly imaginative and poetic quality of many of the essays of Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt. The poetic and cadenced prose of these writers was in part the result of their theories as to the legitimate relation between prose and poetry, but chiefly an expression of their romantic temperament.

A reawakened sense of the beauties of nature, which was a striking feature of the Romantic Revival, is found in the work of the familiar essayists as well as in the poetry of the period. The essayists not only describe nature and the picturesque, but discuss nature in its relation to art and life. Hazlitt's theory of man's attachment to natural objects, and the romantic sentiment with which he invests them, closely parallels Wordsworth's treatment of nature. The familiar essayists' love of nature and the picturesque expresses itself in charming natural description which frequently is poetic in expression; in description of the picturesque in towns and people; in a gospel of beauty elaborated by Hunt; in the romantic interest with which places are invested, evidenced particularly in Hunt's and Lamb's treatment of London life; and in the recollection of well-loved places and scenes connected with the



essayists' childhood. In its treatment of nature as well as in its self-revelation, the familiar essay marks a definite divergence from the periodical essay. Even though the essays of the latter part of the eighteenth century show some romantic feeling in the treatment of the picturesque in nature and in city life, they contain nothing comparable, in amount or kind, to the romantic treatment of nature in the work of Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt.

The impulse given to self-revelation comes largely from Rousseau, whose influence was especially strong upon Hazlitt. A parallel may be drawn also between Wordsworth and the familiar essayists—in the romantic elements of their self-expression, their impassioned recollection, their turning to the past, and their sympathy with lowly life. Mingled with these romantic elements are realistic features which provide contrast, lend verisimilitude, and give added charm to the essay. In the frankness and fulness with which Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt reveal themselves, no less than in the romantic coloring of their writing, they differ from the essayists of the eighteenth century. The familiar essayists are not hampered by the use of fictitious mouthpieces. They speak in their own persons and from the heart—confessing not only their “amiable weaknesses” but at times personal matters that other men would hug to their bosoms, and not infrequently breaking forth in lyric cry that has the poignancy of lyric poetry.

The most distinctive element in Hunt, Lamb and Hazlitt is the highly imaginative and individualistic quality of their work. This appears equally in their treatment of nature and their self-revelation. Their imaginative range is wide and runs the scale from light and entertaining fancy to passionate intensity. Hunt is more fanciful than imaginative in a poetic sense, and seldom shows exaltation of feeling. Hazlitt, on the contrary, frequently pours forth his emotions in a lyrical ecstasy. Lamb's imagination is the most original in the manner in which it plays over and illuminates whatever interests him. The way in which these essayists view life, muse upon its meaning, and discover truth and beauty in simple things makes their appeal comparable to that of the poet. They work in the spirit of the creative artist. They deal with the stuff of the imagination and the emotions, and in a manner to give full play to individuality and temperament. And it is this more than

all else perhaps that raises these early nineteenth century essays, or at least a large proportion of them, to the rank of great literature and places them at the very summit of achievement in the essay form in England.



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\* Note: The definitive edition of the *Works* of Hazlitt, edited by P. P. Howe has not been used, owing to its still being incomplete.

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